

In Search of African Diasporas

Testimonies and Encounters



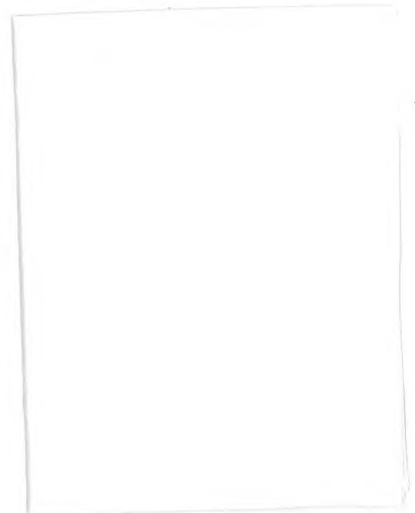
Paul Tiyambe Zeleza

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In Search of African Diasporas



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reading, lecturing, waiting, eating, dancing, being conned out of his money, receiving extraordinary generosity, falling sick, or getting sick of some of the people he meets.

It is indeed a human story, within which are many other stories, such as his love story with Cassandra, his wife; his father-child relations with Mwai, his son, and Natasha, his daughter; his job transitions in those four years; the death of a friend and the celebrations and frustration in the different passages in his life.

Politics, Rights, and Identities

As I read this book, I realize and become convinced that the African diaspora conditions are principally about rights, justice, politics, and political economies. These are stories of structural exclusion, historical grievances, and contemporary issues of rights, recognition, awareness, and consciousness-raising and identity politics. Of course, there are individual stories here of alienation, imposed shame, and frustration, but there are also collective stories. There are collective stories of erasure, social labeling and stigmatization, collective presence in degraded neighborhoods and settlements, obstacles and denial of access to education and various opportunities of social mobility and transformation. But beyond the stories of neglect, abandonment, prejudice, structural racism, we see strong expressions of individual and collective agencies. We see forms of self-organization and consciousness-raising. We see new forms of memorialization, conscientization and recognition through books, music, dance, and cultural performances. We see political organizing and mobilizing around human rights issues. We are beginning to hear and see voices and presences hitherto hidden, suppressed, marginalized.

In many ways, Zeleza's encounters and narratives here constitute another form of giving voice, recognizing existence and presence to all these hitherto neglected, marginalized, exploited, and denied African diasporas found around the world. I am convinced that this book is only part of a beginning of an awakening—a recognition and valorization of communities and peoples around the world that have been isolated and have often been at the bottom of the heap. This book, and many more interventions and actions to come, will draw attention to the gross human and peoples' rights violations that their contemporary conditions embody as well as the struggles of African diasporas for agency, for belonging, for their humanity.

Tade Akin Aina
New York, June 4, 2011

Preface and Acknowledgments

This book owes its existence to many people across numerous countries in the Pan-African world of African diasporas. They welcomed me, shared with me their experiences, insights, struggles, tragedies, triumphs, and aspirations. It started out of curiosity, my immense curiosity about the diasporic histories and conditions of my own immediate family, of many of my friends and colleagues, and about the peoples of African descent scattered around the world. This intellectual yearning was cultivated through my professional historical work, my fascination with popular culture, and my enduring passions for Pan-African struggles and solidarity.

My personal and professional biographies are inscribed by the diaspora condition from the very beginning. I am a product of southern Africa's precolonial, colonial and postcolonial migrations that created multilayered diasporas in and from the region. My mother is descended from the Nguni who spread across southern Africa following the rise of Shaka's Zulu nation in the early 19th century; in Malawi and Zambia they became Ngoni. My Malawian-born parents met and married in Zimbabwe in the mid-1950s where I was born; they were part of the waves of labor migrations spawned by the region's settler colonial capitalisms. I received my primary, secondary and undergraduate education in Malawi before leaving for my master's degree and doctorate in England and Canada, respectively. Like so many young Africans, my sojourn to England and Canada for graduate education was fueled by Africa's postcolonial developmentalist ambitions. Unfortunately, we increasingly remained abroad because of the continent's deepening authoritarianism that frustrated the triple dreams of uhuru for self-determination, development, and democracy.

Looking back, it is clear my diasporic life and my enduring fascination with the diaspora was incubated by my family's multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-lingual realities and identities. In 1972, just as I was about to enter college at 17, my family fled President Banda's dictatorship in Malawi back to white-ruled Rhodesia, as Zimbabwe was then known. A dozen years later, they moved to Botswana. I completed my bachelor's degree in 1976 and after a year as a teaching assistant at the University of Malawi I moved to Britain for my MA and Canada for my PhD. After the completion of my studies I held a series of positions at universities in Jamaica (1982–1984), Kenya (1984–1990), Canada (1990–1995), and the United States (since 1995).

In the meantime, I got married to an African-Canadian woman whose descendants on her mother's side were Black loyalists from the American War of Independence who settled in Nova Scotia in the late 18th century and she counts among her ancestors William Hall, the great black Canadian seaman renowned for his services during the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny in the 1850s. My current wife is an African-American woman whose family has long lived on what today is called George Washington's Birthplace Road and for centuries in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Clearly, as is the case with many African

Americans my wife's family has longer roots in the U.S. than most European American families whose ancestors came as immigrants.

So my immediate family is quite cosmopolitan or Afropolitan as they say in Southern Africa: my father has Botswana citizenship, my son is a Malawian, my daughter a Canadian, and my wife an American. I have first cousins who are of South African, Zimbabwean, and several other African and non-African nationalities. Thus, the African, global, and diasporic scope of my scholarly work springs as much from my autobiography as from my academic research interests. Unlike many history graduate students of my generation, I did my dissertation on countries other than my own. For my master's degree I wrote on Tanzania and for my doctorate on Kenya. Most of my major publications beginning with the award-winning *A Modern Economic History of Africa* (1993) have focused on Africa as a whole rather than the sub-Saharan canard of Eurocentric historiography.

My fascination with Africa's place in the world informs much of my recent work as evident in *Rethinking Africa's Globalization* (2003) and the edited two-volume collection, *The Study of Africa*, which examines the way Africa has been studied in the major social science and humanities disciplines and in different world regions including Europe, Asia and the Pacific, North and South America, and the Caribbean. This book represents my deepening immersion into diaspora studies. My intellectual gravitation to diaspora studies started in my youth, although in the 1960s the term African diasporas was hardly used. The growth of African diaspora studies as a distinctive field is quite recent thanks to complex intellectual, institutional, and ideological developments within and outside the academy. This includes the rise of cultural, postcolonial, and globalization studies that recast Africa's transnational engagements, and the establishment of diaspora studies programs and publication outlets. Also, the exponential rise in African global migrations was accompanied by growing assertiveness among the diasporas themselves who were increasingly valued by African states for their remittances.

Before many of us in my youth became aware of the global dimensions of the African diaspora as such, we knew about black people in the Americas brought there through the barbaric history of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Our attitudes to the Americas, especially the United States, were ambivalent. For many of us growing up in the newly independent African states in the 1960s, the U.S. and the West more generally seduced us with its modernity, its immense possibilities, its African diaspora presence. Besides our own national and regional popular cultures, we grew up listening to the inimitable sounds of Motown, admiring the incomparable sportsmanship of the Brazilian soccer maestro, Pele, and the telegenic boxer, Muhammad Ali. As we matured we were gripped by the civil rights struggles and defiant oratory of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X among many others. Later in college we read Frantz Fanon's searing indictment of the psychologies and pathologies of racism, and we were introduced to the novels of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison with their harrowing tales of the savagery of segregation in the United States and the heroic struggles by black people for survival, sanity, and citizenship. We felt an intimate familiarity with the West for its modernity built on the backs of our peoples' exploitation and dehumanization.

The project from which this book is drawn gave me an incredible opportunity to study African diasporas around the world. It began its present life in Nairobi in 2002 when I met my great friend Tade Aina, who was then Ford Foundation Representative for Eastern Africa. Tade told me of a visit of Indian Siddis to East Africa the Foundation had sponsored.

He wondered whether I might be interested in doing a project on African diasporas in the Atlantic world. We continued discussing this in the subsequent months and years. The idea grew, became more intriguing, more appealing. I thought to myself, why limit myself to the Atlantic, and not do a global history of African diasporas? Such a project would marry my longstanding interests in world history, globalization, Pan-Africanism, and international relations, and my emerging interests in transnational African migrations, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and diaspora studies. In 2005, I decided to apply for a grant from the Ford Foundation for a global project on African diasporas, entitled "Africa and Its Diasporas: Dispersals and Linkages."

The project sought to map out the dispersal of African peoples in all the major world regions, including Asia, Europe, and the Americas; compare the processes of diaspora formation within and among these regions, and examine the ebbs and flows in linkages between these diasporas and Africa over time. Besides the historical accounting of these processes and dynamics, I sought to contribute to the theoretical literature on diasporas in general and African diasporas in particular. By the time I applied for the grant, I had started writing and publishing papers seeking to elucidate the conceptual challenges in diaspora studies. I have continued doing so over the last few years as the theoretical and methodological issues have become clearer and sharper from my deepening engagement with the vast literature in the field. Since the project began, I have collected hundreds of books and thousands of articles on this infinitely complex and fascinating subject. I promised the Ford Foundation three sets of products, first, a series of theoretical essays, second, a memoir of my travels, and third, scholarly volumes on each of the three aspects of the project. With this book, I deliver on the second.

My first thanks, then, go to the Ford Foundation and Tade Aina who provided me with sufficient resources to travel to more than a dozen countries in South and North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia to conduct extensive research on African diaspora communities. The countries were carefully chosen, based on my knowledge at the time the proposal was written, to represent different trajectories of African diaspora histories, cultures, identities, and possibilities. If I were to write the proposal now, it is possible I would have come up with a slightly different cast of countries. But I believe the countries recorded in this volume offer fascinating insights into the diverse experiences of African diasporas that are rich in their own right and in comparative perspective. As far as I know, this is the most extensive survey on African diaspora ever undertaken by any one scholar, let alone an African scholar. Given the vast scope of the project, the numerous people who helped me either in making contacts, agreeing to be interviewed, or simply sharing their views or companionship, trying to list all of them would take pages. But I owe special thanks to several people who helped me to make contacts in the following countries: Ben Vinson III for Venezuela and Mexico; Diane Pinderhughes and Kim Butler for Brazil; Marsha Figaro and Nixon Camilien for Haiti; John Long and Ani Ekpenyong for Germany; Wangui wa Goro and Onyekachi Wambu for Britain; Mamadou Diouf and Giulia Bonacci for France; Lynette Jackson and Maria de Los Angeles Torres for Cuba; Antumi Toasije for Spain; Ajay Dubey and Renu Modi for India; and Ahmed Sikainga, Salah Hassan and Alamin Mazrui for the Gulf states of Qatar, Dubai, and Oman. In each of these countries I benefitted from the generosity of many people including those who served as research assistants or key interlocutors. I am particularly indebted to Alejandro Correa and Roger Baker in Venezuela; Alessandra Mello da Costa, Taynar Pereira, and Veronica in Brazil; Katia Mombrun in Haiti; Danielle Terrazas Williams in Mexico; John Long and Ani Ekpenyong in Germany; Mpalive Msiska in Britain; Cyril

Musila in France; Rita Olga in Cuba; Vidham Pathak, Kunal Mittal, Aparajita Biswas, Rekha Pande, and Kiran Kamal Prasad in India; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf and Mohamed Abdallah in Qatar; Aisha Bilkhair Khalifa and Hamdy Hassan in Dubai; and Ibrahim Noor in Oman. They were superb in every sense, diligent, brilliant, and profoundly charitable with their energy, insights, and tolerance for a researcher hungry for knowledge and information sometimes without the necessary language skills, background, or the patience of time and understanding. I am deeply indebted to them and to the numerous people I talked to and who helped me gain deeper understanding of the complexities and ever-changing dimensions and dynamics of African diaspora histories in their respective societies.

What I have tried to do in this book is share with you my daily record of impressions, experiences, conversations, observations, and even confusion during the four years I traveled to different countries for the project. I have refrained from editing the daily entries with the advantage of hindsight. I took copious notes when I talked to people, or tried to remember and record my experiences and the conversations immediately after. Every evening I spent long hours, sometimes up to five or six, recording and trying to make sense of my encounters, testimonies, and thoughts. The dozens of people I talked to may not always agree with my rendering of their comments, or our meetings, but this is not meant to be a verbatim record, let alone a collective research travel memoir. It is a personal account. Nevertheless, I apologize in advance for any egregious misrepresentations.

This project took me away from my family for long weeks at a time. I know it was taxing on them, especially my wife, as my two children are now adults and live on their own. It is with deep gratitude that I thank Cassandra for her support and patience, for her willingness to tolerate my long absences and bear with me when I returned exhausted from the grueling trips and daily writing. She was the first to read the entire manuscript and she loved it, and encouraged me to get it published. Natasha and Mwai give me the immeasurable pleasure of fatherhood, and I cherish their support for my professional work, including my numerous writing projects, even if they don't always read my books. I hope they read this one though because it is about their history as part of the new African diaspora.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza
Los Angeles, February 2012

2006



Venezuela

June 17, 2006

I woke up a few minutes before 3:00 a.m. quite excited and a little anxious about my first trip to South America—if I exclude my trip to Trinidad in 2004—and certainly to mainland South America. Since I packed most of my things last night I only had a few items to finish packing: toiletries, the new camera I bought yesterday, passport. Cassandra woke up almost immediately after I did. She has this capacity to be utterly cheerful in the morning, this lovely smile, almost joyful hunger for the day to begin. She takes enormous pleasure in reminding me not to forget anything, going over items like she is a mother talking to her adorable child. It's hilarious, all in good fun, love.

After my shower, I quickly dashed downstairs to check my e-mail one last time, just in case there were any messages from any of my contacts in Venezuela and Brazil, or even my prospective Dean at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). None was there from these sources. But I got an interesting message from Thandabanthu Nhlapho at the University of Cape Town, who indicated he was working on my appointment as a visiting professor at UCT. He wondered whether I might still be interested to take up a position as UCT director of international programs. There were other messages commenting on my blog post on African universities on *The Zeleza Post*.

Cassandra drove me to the airport about an hour after we woke up. We passed through the shops to get razor blades and fifteen minutes later we were at the tiny airport—one of the few beauties of living in a small university town is that everything is so close. We hugged, kissed, and said goodbye.

The flight from State College to Philadelphia was uneventful as usual, smooth. I re-read the university's blog and found a few typos which I planned to correct once I had access to a computer with an Internet connection. The flight from Philadelphia to Miami was delayed by almost an hour. I spent the time walking up and down the airport for some exercise and began reading the most recent copy of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that I brought with me. The travails of American universities and the violence in the world continue to amaze me. There was an article on the mediocrity, the growing academic incompetence of American students. The consumerization of student behavior seems to be linked to be the corporatization of universities and the commoditization of knowledge production. This is a system in which students increasingly see themselves and are treated as customers, universities are run as business enterprises, research is increasingly subject to proprietary norms, and faculty success is largely measured through scholarly productivity rather than teaching effectiveness. All these trends are evident at Penn State. Also evident are the challenges that face Africana studies, departments that combine African and African American studies. There are the national divisions between continental Africans and African Americans, the disciplinary divisions between the social scientists and humanists,

the political divisions between those who valorize activism or scholarship, and the gender divisions between male and female faculty.

Finally, we left Philly, the self-advertised City of Brotherly Love, at 1:20 p.m. I was sandwiched between two people: a woman who seemed unusually preoccupied and a man who seemed anxious to grin. I ate the sandwich I bought in the airport—they hardly feed you on planes these days—and fell asleep until about half an hour before landing in Miami. From the air, you see these great plains, irrigated fields, lagoons and lakes lapping at the vast blue sea, and then an endless stretch of housing estates and shacks as far as the eye can see, until you see on the edges of the city the skyscrapers vying with each other in what must be the city center. I was told in Philadelphia that because of the flight delay I would probably miss my connecting flight to Caracas. Fortunately, I got to the check-in desk when they were boarding. Now my worry was whether my luggage would make it. I had packed an extra carry-on bag for this eventuality, so I didn't feel too bad.

I sat next to a very pleasant fellow, a young Venezuelan businessman. He was in the business of air conditioning. At first, I thought he was just talkative or that he wanted to practice his stuttering English on me. Ordinarily, I don't like talking to strangers on planes, some of whom seem all too anxious to confide in you their life's intimacies. It must be the fear of being in a confined box, floating unsteadily in the air. But I did want to talk to him, to get a few pointers to my arrival in a part of the world I had never been to, whose language I did not speak. Between his heroic effort at speaking English and my total ignorance of Spanish, we struck up a conversation. He gave me tips on the need to be careful at the airport in getting a taxi and offered to help me do so. He noted that Caracas was dangerous, which did little to cheer me up. I asked him about Afro-Venezuelans. He said they were many, that his own brother was one. That was a little confusing, for he looked "white." He said his mother was dark and his father white. His brother, this much I found out, was a law professor at a university outside Caracas. But we did not have the language to go beyond such rudimentary disclosures; thankfully, all he asked me was about my job. Strangely, when I told him I taught history, he revealed he loved films about Dracula. As it was, there was a *King Kong* film on the flight. I tried to watch it as a way of closing the conversation and, out of curiosity, to see how the remake of *King Kong* looked. I must have seen the first *King Kong* as a kid. But the scenes of savages in some remote island of primates and primitive dark-looking people was too much for me and I returned to the comfort of reading *The Chronicle of Higher Education* followed by *The New York Times* that I bought at the airport.

Just before we landed, the Venezuelan fellow sitting next to me offered tips on the exchange rate and even exchanged the equivalent of ten dollars with me. The airport was extremely clean; its air of cleanliness enhanced by white walls and tall columns of steel, massive windows and bright lights. While on the plane there were very few black people; I counted no more than three as I walked along the aisles to my seat near the back. In the airport terminal I saw more black people wearing badges indicating they were some kind of airport employee. When I went to the bathroom, one followed me and pulled the paper towel from the wall for me to dry my hands. I wondered whether that was customary or whether he was just being nice, or whether I looked suspicious. Lack of language communication prevented me from finding out.

The immigration official, a charming lady, courteously asked me how long I would be in the country and cheerfully stamped my passport and welcomed me to Venezuela. It was all so simple, so nice; it buoyed my spirits. To my surprise, I collected my luggage which I thought had not made it on the flight. Then my newly found buddy from the plane helped me get a taxi. There was a little drama when the owner of a taxi asked, when we got the taxi, for \$60. I thought my "buddy" had indicated a much lower figure. We

hassled for a while, but I decided it wasn't worth it. At the back of my mind was the fear of being ripped off like I was in Cairo—an event which prompted me to enroll in an Arabic class when I returned to Illinois. There were other reasons, but this made a good party joke. And I remembered my "buddy's" warning that Caracas was dangerous.

The taxi driver himself was a young, pleasant Afro-Venezuelan man. We both tried hard to have a conversation, but to no avail. Even our simple words in Spanish and English were totally lost in translation. So, we settled on the universal language of music—he put on a CD of Venezuelan salsa that sounded very much like Trinidadian calypso with a Latin touch. As the music pulsated, the taxi waded through the hills and the air got cooler. It all looked strangely enchanting. There was the canopy of lights along the hills from houses and as we got closer to the city's massive apartment blocks. The multi-lane highway took us from the airport to the city center where the Hilton Hotel, which I booked yesterday through Travelocity, was located.

The young man at the hotel registration desk was also very pleasant. He said he had lived in Arlington, Virginia sixteen years ago. There was a wedding party taking pictures in the hotel lobby and the registration clerk said he felt sorry for the groom an indication to me that he himself was not married, which he confirmed when I asked him. I got to my room on the eighteenth floor a little exhausted but exhilarated at the same time. I was in Caracas! I called Cassandra briefly to tell her I had arrived safely. Too anxious to stay in the room, I went downstairs to a restaurant to eat, although I was not feeling terribly hungry. I sat in the terrace restaurant where they had a lovely buffet and the few people sitting there were watching the remaining minutes of the World Cup match between the United States and Italy, which ended in a 1–1 draw. Later, once I returned to my room I found out on BBC World News that Ghana's Black Stars team had beaten the second ranked Czech team 2–0. I was elated for the Ghanaians, for Africa, for black people everywhere. Such is the raw emotive power of world sports. It felt good to be in Venezuela.

June 18, 2006

It was a rather slow day. I woke up unusually late, felt well rested and eager for my first full day in Caracas. I was unable to check e-mail because the hotel business office is closed on Sundays. I called Prof. Alejandro Correa's office number to tell him I had arrived and left a message on his answering machine. I hope he gets back tomorrow morning so that I can secure a research assistant and start the project. Today is for a well-deserved rest; I consoled myself.

I went back to the terrace restaurant by the pool for lunch. There were a lot more people today than last night. The World Cup match between Brazil and Australia was on. No prize guessing which side all of us were rooting for: the Brazilians. And they did not disappoint, they won 2–0. The Australians put on a brave fight, but Brazil was simply too superior; their ability to score when they have a chance is lethal. The team was virtually all black. The dominance of the African diaspora in sports was on full display even in the match between France and South Korea later in the day. The French team was full of West and North Africans. Sports integration is well advanced, but one would be a fool to assume much more than that about the state of integration and equality for the Afro-French, as the riots of last year amply demonstrated.

After lunch, I came back to the room briefly, then decided to take a long walk across the city. Being a Sunday, many establishments were closed for business, but the street vendors were open. But it was all so tranquil, no solicitation of customers, no loud advertisement of merchandise; the vendors sat and conversed and sometimes laughed, more with each other than with customers, so it seemed to me in a rather subdued manner compared to scenes in a typical African city. Maybe this is because it was a Sunday.

The city seems largely built in a valley ringed by mountains. It typically combines ultra-modern skyscrapers, all those glass contraptions that loudly announce their wealth and elegance, as well the brutal concrete boxes that blight many a city landscape. Along the street I walked on the sidewalks were strewn with vendors, especially so the further I walked from the hotel toward the metro center, which was some kind of mall. The city was undecided whether it wanted to be clean or dirty; parts were very clean, hosed down in front of universities and banks; others served as a refuge for the urban litter of plastic bags and paper, and occasionally I walked past corners that reeked of urine. On my way back I took a detour from the road leading to the hotel and came across what appeared to be a large Sunday market carved from a long section of a beach highway. It was a vivacious scene; all manner of fresh tropical foods and fruits were on sale as well as a number of packaged items.

Throughout the walk I noticed, to my increasing curiosity, more and blacker people—men, women, and children walking together or roaming about, vendors and passersby, couples and families, young and old. I remember one blind, tall black man walking with his cane, and several black female teenagers dressed in tight jeans and skimpy tops as one would see in any American city yapping with abandon on their cell phones. On the street at the Sunday market were vendors in front of their yams, cassava, and fruits who would be indistinguishable from vendors in Nairobi or Blantyre or Johannesburg. If these street vendors were anything to go by, then it would appear that the black presence was a visible one indeed. That might explain why nobody stared at me or tried to solicit me to buy anything. Many times, I wanted to start up a conversation but the language barrier held me back. It was a powerful reminder of the limits of English, that the African diaspora speaks tongues other than English. If Africa is serious about linkages with its diaspora, then it might want to take the teaching of Spanish, one of the major languages spoken by many in the diaspora, a lot more seriously.

The rest of the evening was quiet. I got my dinner in another restaurant in the hotel, then returned to my room and watched a rather touching movie—*Sea Biscuit*—set during the Great Depression about a horse that serves as a metaphor for the struggles and eventual triumph of the ordinary masses. Typical Hollywood—it had to have a great, happy ending. Then I watched the news, the same old dreary stories about the Iraq War. I hope American imperialism is buried, defeated, in the sands of Iraq to save the rest of the world from future unprovoked wars of aggression. What does the American government think it is? Who gave it the right to police the world, to control the world? Its imperial arrogance and global greed are quite troubling.

June 19, 2006

This was a terribly tragic day. It all started when I checked my e-mail in the hotel's cyber café and found a message from Sally McMurray, the head of the History department,

to members of the department relaying a message from Robyn Spencer, one of our colleagues, that her husband, Karim Basse, had died. There were no further details as to how he had died. A million thoughts raced through my mind. Maybe it was a car accident. He was too healthy for anything like a heart attack or stroke. I was confused. I recalled only a few weeks ago he and Robyn invited Cassandra and me to their house for dinner and what a great dinner it was, and how much fun we all had. And those pictures on the wall, black and white pictures of the young, handsome couple with their incredibly beautiful daughter Sira; how we admired them, the pictures of the young, apparently happy family.

Only a few days after the dinner Karim came over to our house to help fix the Vonage Internet phone line he and Robyn had convinced us to switch to. And then I called him a few days later, after I returned from Sweden, to tell him that the phone was not working properly. He returned my call, but we never met again. All the images of the various times we had met flooded through my mind: the parties they attended at our house, those we all attended at Nan Woodruff's, the time we had dinner at the Nittany patio, and yes, the way he would hold his infant daughter, Sira, in one hand, his face bathed with the smile of a happy, proud father. What a lovely couple he and Robyn made. Now he was dead. It was hard to believe.

I called Cassandra, who hadn't heard the news. She couldn't believe it. She called back a few moments later. Her voice was choking with tears. Robyn had sent her and others a message about the tragic circumstances of Karim's sudden death on a blind list. I immediately sat on the edge of the bed, deeply shaken as Cassandra gave me more details. She said Robyn was devastated but trying quite hard to be strong for her daughter, and the community was rallying for her. Why? Why did such tragedies happen? Why would fate condemn his lovely little daughter to a fatherless future, to such a dreadful memory? We both felt for her, Sira, orphaned at ten months. Later in the evening, I called Tiya Maluwa, my old Malawian friend from St. Patrick's Secondary School, where we both started Form 1 in 1969, who is also at Penn State in the Law School, and he, too, was shocked at the news, incredulous that Karim, whom he had met on a couple of occasions was dead. We lamented the unpredictability of life, the fragility of the human condition.

I finally managed to get in touch with Professor Alejandro Correa with the Instituto Universitario Barlovento. He apologized for not having come to welcome me at the airport due to an illness in the family. He came to the hotel in the evening and found me in the restaurant as I was about to finish dinner. A short, stocky, and balding man, easily given to a smile, he gave me a hearty handshake. I was immediately aware of his political passion for his people, the Afro-Venezuelans, for in the course of the one hour or so that we spent together, I learned a lot about the country's history and current state and the pivotal role played by Afro-Venezuelans. They built the country, he said emphatically. They constituted the majority population, but have been discriminated against for so long that their demographic weight was not evident in their current economic or political status.

But things were changing, he said. The new government—well it was no longer so new since it was almost six years old—had finally acknowledged the need to confront racism. It derived much of its support from the poor, many of whom were blacks, and the military, many of whose members were also black as the army was one of the few avenues open to them for social advancement. He was really interested in my personal background, not so much in terms of personal details, but my take, as an African intellectual, on Eurocentric definitions and classifications of African phenomena, in this case my language and ethnic

identities. We discussed the need for Africans in the diaspora to know each other better, to communicate more effectively, for we owed each other solidarity to advance our peoples' welfare on both sides of the Atlantic. He is trained in public administration and has been doing a lot of work on the development of Afro-Venezuelan cultural sites and institutions.

He has taught for the last 34 years and was recently appointed Africa Chair at the Instituto Universitario Barlovento. These chairs were recently created in all universities to promote and concentrate focus on African affairs in the universities. He said I had come at the right time, for June was Venezuela's equivalent of Black History Month in the United States and a lot of important cultural activities would be held in the next few days culminating in a big festival on June 24. I had also come at the right time because of the many changes that were going on concerning the place of Afro-Venezuelans in the country's affairs. He sounded upbeat.

He laid out some of the activities he had planned for my research visit, including attending seminars at two universities and visiting farms with large concentrations of Afro-Venezuelans. Much of what he said resonated with what I had been reading earlier that afternoon, *Afro-Latin America 1800–2000* by George Reid Andrews, a fine overview of Afro-Latin American history. It describes the huge African demographic presence and contributions in Venezuela that are not well known outside the country, and which the white corporate and political elites as Correa calls them have tried to silence. I went to bed early, as Correa indicated a colleague of his would be picking me up at 7:00 a.m. to begin our tour of the country.

June 20, 2006

I had to get up unusually early today to start my work. Professor Sanchez, a friend of Alejandro, came to pick me up at 7:15 a.m. for the trip to their university. The Instituto Universitario Barlovento is the country's only black university and was opened in 1996 after years of struggle by the black community for such a university.

The journey to Barlovento was picturesque. We passed through Caracas, which is a vast sprawling city of immense contrasts in terms architecture. The traffic was so heavy that we crawled for long stretches. What I found particularly startling as we snaked out of the city center were the houses for the poor along the hills, perched perilously on top of each other; concrete cobwebs of red brick, only occasionally broken by other colors—white, green painted exteriors—that stared defiantly, almost reproachfully, at the smart, tall apartment blocks across the sprawling highway. This, I discovered and confirmed later that evening on our return, is what gave the city at night its carpet of lights. During the day, it was not so pretty, a veritable eyesore, the poor staring down insistently and insolently at the rich as they drove to and from work. In many cities, the hills are the preserve of the rich, filled with monstrous houses; here the poor had seized the high ground if only symbolically to implant their discomforting presence.

The landscape was also stunning. We snaked through hilly forested mountains before we descended into the low lying flatlands of savanna vegetation that seemed so much like some parts of Malawi. Indeed, as we drove it seemed as if we were traveling in two countries simultaneously: the mountains of Pennsylvania, those broad multi-lane highways tore and teased their way through the mountains, and Malawi, with a single lane highway as

we branched off from the main highway, along which were kiosks selling fruits and simple items. There were men and women, and sometimes children, walking and leaving from their houses a few feet from the road; simple, semi-rural houses surrounded by fruit trees and lines of drying clothes. I noticed that some houses had columns jutting out of their flat roofs. Alejandro explained that they were left for the children to build their own floors in future. What a fascinating idea of family continuity!

We picked up Alejandro on the way to Barlovento at a small town about half an hour drive, in normal traffic, from Caracas. At first, I thought we had arrived at the university. The problem is that Prof. Sanchez and I could not really communicate—he speaks no English at all and I speak no Spanish. So we gestured a lot, made various communicative sounds of mutual recognition, and occasionally exchanged words when the phenomenon in question was absolutely clear to both of us, like the heavy traffic—*mucho tráfico*, I learned. And of course, music—*música*—that he put on to save us both from our self-imposed embarrassed silences. It was beautiful music: rumba and jazz, all instrumental, slow, insistent, and lovely. We listened to it whenever we were in the car. As we picked up Alejandro I met his wife and two sons, one was two years old and the other was three months old. He was obviously proud of his family. I couldn't tell if his wife was white, or a "light-skinned sister" as Cassandra and her folks would say.

Barlovento is a small town of mixed character; posh apartments and rundown buildings and dwellings. As you get into what looks like the city center you are greeted by a big white statue of the Virgin Mary, or what looks like her, carrying a baby, presumably Jesus. What intrigued me as we entered Barlovento, indeed, as we drove from Caracas, was how increasingly black the people were. The work gangs on the road constructing a new highway, the people working on the streets, the school kids in their bright light-blue shirts and dark-blue pants, were mostly black. I could have been anywhere in Southern Africa or East Africa. Africans had indeed survived here; they were a powerful presence. Alejandro's figures now seemed real, irrefutable in the rainbow of colors of Afro-Venezuela.

The university was a disappointment. It was a two-structure complex. One served as the administrative building where the administrative offices were located, including the offices of the heads of departments who sit in an open space divided into cubicles. The other contained offices for support services, including the clinic and classrooms. There was a semi open-air, multi-purpose facility, also rather rundown, which served as a hall for sports, music events, and convocation. I was told it is well decorated for commencement and becomes a truly impressive auditorium.

But what the university lacked in physical assets it more than makes up in spirit. Everyone I met was friendly, enthusiastic, even. I was introduced to the Dean of the University (equivalent to a Vice-Chancellor or rector or president), the Dean of Academics (provost), and Dean of the Administration, as well as heads of most of the departments. Many were fascinated by the fact that I was an African based in the U.S. We walked around the campus; the students looked like any you might see on an American campus: the young men in baggy pants, jeans mostly, and T-shirts, and the young women in tight pants and those skimpy tops that delight in showing part of the stomach and the lower parts of the back.

Part of the afternoon while Alejandro was teaching, Sanchez drove me to a small town, San Jose, a charming and predominantly black town where he and one of Alejandro's parents were born. I sat in the town square, in front of the church, and watched the people go about their ways. My only regret is that I was unable to talk to anybody. This

language handicap is no laughing matter. I was delighted to meet, later that afternoon when we returned to the campus, a Trinidadian lecturer, Roger Baker, who kindly agreed to work with me as a translator once I move to Barlovento over the weekend. That will help tremendously.

I also discovered while sitting in Alejandro's office and reading a speech Sanchez gave me on Pan-Africanism, written in Spanish, that with my limited high school French learned more than thirty years ago, I could actually read and understand the speech. Academic prose in Spanish shares so many words with French and English that the task of reading is infinitely easier than speaking. These languages are really part of the same linguistic family; if Africans were to classify them the way Europeans classified some of our languages they could be called dialects! This gave me added confidence that I could function in written Spanish.

The drive back to Caracas was pleasant. Alejandro was superb in his unobtrusive translation of the three-way conversation among the three of us. And the music and cool evening breeze were invigorating, and those lights flickering from the hills, as we got closer to Caracas, offered a pleasant view of the Caracas skyline. I arrived back, more than twelve hours after I left this morning, feeling elated.

But my excitement was quickly dampened when I switched on the TV and the world of war and conflict intruded. I was particularly incensed by an interview on CNN with Angelina Jolie about her visits to Africa. She said something about Africans being a "tribal" people. It was sickening to watch. I will write a blog on this tomorrow about all these self-appointed saviors of Africa.

June 21, 2006

Sanchez came to pick me up at 7:00 a.m. Getting up so early is the part of the trip I had not expected! The traffic was as heavy as it was yesterday. While yesterday I was struck by the shanties hugging the hills as we drove out of Caracas, today I took in more of the fashionable Caracas, the elegant office buildings, the well-appointed apartment blocks and townhouses on their own hills, and the motley crew of cars and vans that hugged the congested roads; battered vehicles side by side with sleek luxury cars, the drivers' and passengers' faces a veritable display of the rainbow colors of the Venezuelan people.

Sanchez and I got more courageous in trying to talk to each other, and he seemed keen to learn a few English words and expressions. He reciprocated by teaching me how to count in Spanish and I tried to memorize some handy words. The counting was similar, save for the pronunciation, to French. I felt my theory on the romance languages was vindicated. As if to celebrate our newfound eagerness to communicate verbally, for much of the day Sanchez played vocal music, a Venezuelan salsa of intoxicating, voluptuous energy. Like yesterday, we stopped by a gas station to have a cup of steaming, richly flavored coffee before proceeding to pick up Alejandro.

Both Alejandro and Sanchez were dressed in African shirts, the former in a kente-colored short-sleeved shirt and the latter in a long-sleeved cream shirt with an embroidered, open neck. I, too, had put on an African shirt I bought several years ago. We all jokingly admired each other's taste in fine African attire!

The drive today had the tranquility of slight familiarity. It rained last night so the trees and grass had a wet freshness to them, and the sun was not as hot. When Sanchez and Alejandro became lost in conversation, I began drafting my blog on Angelina Jolie, which I decided to entitle "Angelina Jolie Discovers Africa." I can now vent all my anger at the media and all these ignorant would-be saviors of Africa. Whenever I had a chance during the day, I worked on the blog. I posted it this evening.

Alejandro introduced me to more officials and department heads, including those of sports and theatre. Once again, I was amazed at the friendliness of everybody I met and had I known how to speak Spanish I am sure we would have had fascinating conversations—the curiosity about me, about Africa, even about the U.S. seemed palpable.

I spent much of the day in the library. The library itself was another huge disappointment; it was only a little larger than my home library. I don't think there were more than thirty shelves there, a grim testimony to the marginalization of Afro-Venezuelans in their country's educational system. Most of the books were encyclopedias and textbooks on mathematics, business, and marketing, agricultural development, psychology and the information sciences. There were a handful of journals. The humanities and many of the social sciences were loudly absent. This was more like a vocational school library than a liberal arts college library.

The librarian brought me a few encyclopedias, books, and folders of photocopies on Venezuelan and Afro-Venezuelan history and studies. The general studies were clearly Eurocentric in their obvious silences of the Afro-Venezuelan presence and contributions, which I could tell even with my struggling Spanish read through the prisms of English and French.

After 1:00 p.m., Sanchez picked us up to go for lunch at a hotel where I am booked to stay over the weekend. The cocktail juice was tasty and sweet, perhaps too sweet, and the meal was lovely. I ate with gusto after not having eaten anything the whole day. When we got back to the campus, I returned to the library and finished going through the materials I had been looking at earlier.

The drive back was filled with a joyous celebration of salsa music in between lessons on Venezuelan and Afro-Venezuelan history from Alejandro. Just traveling with him and listening to him is well worth the trip. He and Sanchez are far better than the research assistant I had envisaged; I have to find a way of paying them at least for the transport. They have been so kind, ferrying me from and back to Caracas for the past two days, taking time out of their busy schedules to help a brother better understand their country and their people's history. This is what Pan-African solidarity entails at an interpersonal level: generosity of spirit, comradeship, and mutual intellectual engagement. Last night, Alejandro had asked me to e-mail him a list of topics for which he got the relevant publications from his and Sanchez's personal collections. When we got to Barlovento, he had the books ready and went through them, precisely explaining the contents and value of each. He explained that until recently, there were few works on Afro-Venezuelans, that the publishing industry in Venezuela is relatively small, that the largest Spanish-language publishers are in Mexico and Spain and they couldn't care less about Afro-Venezuelan history and culture. So many Afro-Venezuelan intellectuals have been forced to self-publish and their works are hard to get. We took the selected books to a photocopying kiosk where they will all be photocopied.

When we dropped off Alejandro, he invited us in briefly and I was delighted, for I had secretly wished to get a glimpse of the living conditions of a middle-class Venezuelan

university professor. The estate, a gated one, was large, composed of rows of handsome, rectangular, three-storied, red brick townhouses. We went to a shopping mall for Alejandro to get money from the ATM machine to exchange with my dollars. Yesterday, before we picked him up, Sanchez had driven around the estate and we briefly walked around the lagoon and watched multi-colored fish and tortoises swimming in the slightly muddy-looking water. A woodpecker was gingerly and elegantly perched on a piece of wood, surveying the scene in majestic tranquility. The grounds around the pool and the estate were immaculately clean and green. There was a man by the lagoon sweeping the leaves from the walkway around the lagoon. Alejandro's townhouse, which he has owned since 1997 he said, was quite tiny and sparsely furnished. As much as I could tell, it had three bedrooms, one of which was used as a study, a kitchen, and a living room that doubled as a dining room. His wife kindly served us a glass of passion fruit juice.

When I got back to the hotel I immediately went to check my e-mail in the hotel's cyber café, a cool outfit with about a dozen flat-screen computers, each tucked elegantly in a glass cubicle. The café also serves delicious coffee and one can buy snacks or juice and sit around the bar and order other beverages. There is a television mounted on one of the counters and it had been on each time I have gone there—this being the World Cup season, of course—and music softly filters around the room. It's all so soothing, so inviting.

Finally, the offer from Chicago came in writing from Dean Comer. I was so thrilled. The prospect of living in the Windy City, which I used to visit every so often when I lived in Champaign, and of returning to the University of Illinois, was gratifying. I had fond memories of working at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My experiences at Penn State and State College haven't been as pleasant. Nevertheless, Cassandra and I have met fine people both on and off campus, many of whom we like; became family friends with. Also, there have been the benefits of being close to Cassandra's parents.

The offer largely talks about the personal aspects—salary, research funds, teaching assistant, honorific academic titles, all of which seem wholly acceptable, with minor modifications on the salary front. He also mentioned the interest of the Department of Political Science to look at Cassandra's candidacy during a campus visit. The departmental issues will come later—he wanted to ensure that the personal issues were agreeable first before proceeding. Proceed we must, indeed!

Cassandra was ecstatic at the news and especially about the interest expressed by the Department of Political Science. This was also welcome news for her given the tragedy of Karim's death that everybody has been talking about. Tiya was excited, too, with the news when I talked to him. He understands how much I loved living and working in Illinois and how unhappy I have been here. In the end, it is important that our personal and professional lives are in sync. We will only discuss the timing of my departure to make it the least disruptive for the classes I have been assigned to teach next semester. Tiya was also excited that he had closed on his newly built house in State College. It's a pity I won't be there when he moves in and since Paul Desanker has left. The three of us, from the "Land of the Lake," as we fondly call Malawi, our country, in the same town would have made a wonderful team. He also informed me about the offer from Phil, his dean and my former colleague from Illinois, for an associate deanship for International Studies. I told him he should take it for the career advancement prospects it offers toward a deanship. Fortunately, he was of the same inclination, joking that the extra money that would come with the appointment would surely help with the hefty mortgage he had just assumed.

A wonderful end to a wonderful day!

June 22, 2006

I spent the day in Caracas. Sanchez came in the afternoon and took me to various sites in the city. I took with me my pocket-size English-Spanish phrase finder and dictionary that I bought in State College, which, together with our newfound mutual comfort with language experimentation, made for far more vigorous communication.

We first went to the Museum of Fine Arts of Caracas, a fifteen-minute walk from the hotel. The museum has a fine, if rather limited, collection of sculptures and a more abundant collection of paintings. The collection is typically Eurocentric in its categorization—there is no category for African art, although at the entrance you are met by two huge, beautiful mahogany sculptures of African figures, and there is an Egyptian collection, which as in many museums in the Euro-American world, stands in majestic isolation divorced utterly from its Africanness. And the collection on cubist art loudly betrays its African inspiration of style, motifs, and execution. The rest of the collection is given to Latin American art, medieval and modern European art, contemporary and North American art, and a ceramics collection, stamp collection, and a photographic collection. None of the artists, as far as I could tell, were of African descent, and their subjects barely hinted at an African presence in Venezuela, the Americas, Europe, and the world—an artistic erasure all too common in a world defined and deferred by white supremacy and racism.

The museum leads to the cultural park, in whose immediate environs are several pieces of metal sculpture of uneven quality and power. The park is a large, wooden expanse of land which must be a pleasant sortie for families and individuals seeking solace from the hustle and noise of the city without leaving the city. The trees, tall and majestic, provide lush cover from the sun and there are benches interspersed along the park at appropriate intervals. Sanchez said on Sundays the park is full of people; today there were a few workers digging and clearing a small section of the concrete walkway.

From the park, we stumbled into the heavy streets. Walking enabled us to see and experience the city differently. We joked that it was also good for us given our advancing years. We walked past office buildings and shops and cafes, peeping into one for a brief minute where people were watching the World Cup on the blaring TV as they chatted away and consumed snacks and coffee and beer.

We walked all the way to the University of Central Venezuela, the country's largest university. It is a large campus with the standard divisions and departments—arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medical sciences, and engineering. It is unique compared to Barlovento's black university. I was told the student body was 60,000, among whom, Sanchez insisted, there were relatively few Afro-Venezuelans, although I couldn't tell that from walking around the campus. There seemed to be a sizeable representation of black students. While the racial makeup of the students appeared mixed, I suspect the older folk were faculty and staff who were decidedly whiter. We went to several departments and sections. In the anthropology library, Sanchez asked if they had any materials on the Afro-Venezuelan society and culture and the two lovely attendants behind the glass counter sweetly shook their heads. We then went to an open-air collection of bookstores and kiosks, a most lovely and attractive site reminiscent of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair before Mugabe's regime killed it. I bought a four-volume collection on Venezuelan social, economic, and cultural history and society that Sanchez highly recommended. The main library was large, open, with big wide windows that on the first and second

floors gave incredibly wonderful views of the central campus square and the city mountains hovering behind. As we walked out around the main auditorium, we saw students in their graduation garb practicing for the big day.

The students looked very much like students anywhere I have taught. They were rushing in and out of classes; they were reading, loitering, napping and necking in the library; they were walking and talking excitedly in small groups; a few were morosely alone, one was pushing herself on her walker; others were lounging in the shade of trees. Nobody paid us any mind.

On the way back Sanchez suggested we take the underground metro, but it was so jam-packed that we were unable to do so and instead took a taxi back to the hotel. We had a drink in the bar—a rather strangely quiet bar I must say—before we parted and called it a day.

The rest of the evening I followed the usual routine: checked e-mail, went to eat on the terrace, watched a little TV, and talked to Cassandra on the phone.

June 23, 2006

Today, I decided to take a more comprehensive tour of Caracas. The taxi driver was an elderly man of indigenous origin who spoke English—I had specifically requested one who spoke English. I couldn't have found a better guide—he was informative and funny. We spent the next five hours enjoying each other's company. He was obviously an experienced tour operator, who loves doing what he does, explaining his beloved city to strangers like me. He said he learned his English in the navy and spent time briefly working in the United States and Britain at the dock yards, and the rest, he said with his infectious laughter, he taught himself. He delighted in teaching me words of Spanish from time to time as he explained different sites and sights, asking me to repeat after him until I got the pronunciation correct. He complimented me on my accent and I teased him that he would make an excellent teacher and he should consider changing professions.

The taxi driver and tour guide, Mr. Renaldo Arcinegas, was born about two hours away from the Colombian border. He has three children, all grown, and four grandchildren. He had lived in Caracas much of his life. He explained to me the size of the city—6 million inhabitants—and its social divisions between the very rich who live in sumptuous suburbs that we visited with their tree-lined streets, huge mansions, private schools, clubs and golf courses, and genteel air of prosperity; the middle class districts with their finely appointed apartments and townhouses, many gated into seclusions of obvious comfort overlooking the city; and the poor neighborhoods, teeming on the hilltops or in the older part of the city. Ringed by a mountain range to the north and east, the city was expanding westward at an accelerated rate. He explained the high cost of living—the low-rent apartments were no less than 40 million bolivars (about \$162,000) and the match boxes in the slums were up to 20 million bolivars, if I heard the figures correctly. Cars, too, he noted were very expensive, only gas was cheap, extremely cheap, at about 15 U.S. cents per gallon! Maybe that is why the streets are clogged with so much traffic. He also explained to me the political situation: Chavez's popularity among the poor and the contempt in which he was held by the well-off who dominate the opposition.

I was particularly intrigued by his exposition on the racial composition of the country and the racial stereotypes of Afro-Venezuelans; he referred to them as colored and sometimes

as "negros," i.e., blacks. He mentioned the regions where blacks were to be found in large numbers, such as Barlovento, that they were good, hard-working people, they also love fun—he used an unprintable word—and they had very beautiful women—their shapes he described with his hands, their skin tone, their grace and gaiety. He asked me whether I had been tempted! He noted that the blacks and the indigenous people, whom he referred to as Indians, got along well, had lived side by side in several parts of the country for centuries, and intermarried, a point that Alejandro had also made. Chavez was himself a mixture of Indian and colored, he said, although more Indian than colored. He noted that the Indian population was smaller than the colored population, but he did not estimate the latter.

The tour made me realize that Caracas was much larger than I had originally envisaged and it forced me to change some of my original impressions. We began visiting the new Caracas, the areas of the city built in the last century and in recent decades, then we ended up in the old Caracas, some parts of which go back to the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. It turns out the Hilton Hotel where I am staying is on the boundary between the new and old Caracas and the walk I had taken on my first full day in the city was in the old, more colorful, more vibrant, poorer Caracas.

We started the tour with Florida, the suburb where many of the embassies are located and old money is to be found. We drove by many of the embassies which were hiding behind masses of trees, their flags fluttering in the air of Venezuelan affluence. Not surprisingly, the American embassy was not in this embassy row; it was located by itself in another part of the city, on its own hill from which it commands views of the city, probably watching everything and eavesdropping on everybody. From Florida, we drove to Altamira, another relatively new suburb also smelling of money with its fine homes, manicured lawns, and immaculate apartments. The city is essentially a collection of hills and is on a plateau 3,000 feet above sea level. We snaked up and down the hills, stopping at appropriate intervals to take pictures of the businesses and the office blocks concentrated in the valley below. It is spectacular; the views are indescribably beautiful. I took lots of pictures with my new camera; I just hope they do justice to the views I saw.

Then we cut through the city below to climb towards the opposite end of the new Caracas. En route, beside the heavy traffic to which I was becoming accustomed, there were long lines of cars honking loudly, carrying young people hanging from the windows, with multi-colored balloons fluttering from the roof tops of the cars emblazoned with graffiti. At first I thought it was a wedding party; but the cars were too many and the youths too scrappy for wedding parties. Could it be connected to the World Cup? No, Venezuela was not in the World Cup. Renaldo explained that football or soccer was just now catching on; that baseball is Venezuela's most popular sport. I expressed surprise, exposing my ignorance, my stereotype that all South Americans loved soccer based on Brazil's and Argentina's successes in the World Cup. It turned out the young people were students celebrating graduation. It was a tradition at graduation for young people to drive around during the day announcing to the world they had finalized their studies and drink themselves silly in the evening.

On our way to Old Caracas we passed through the university that I visited with Sanchez yesterday; we drove past the medical school, then we skirted the neighborhood of the Hilton and crossed a tunnel, in front of which there was a huge statue of Simon Bolivar taking a commanding look of the capital of one of the five countries he liberated from Spanish colonial rule—the five being Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, Panama, and Peru.

Renaldo gave me a long and fascinating history of Bolivar and his leadership. We drove past much of the road where I had walked last Sunday. What I hadn't known then was that just behind the street was Bolivar Square where another municipal building, the Congress, and other buildings housing or commemorating institutions of the Venezuelan state were located. One of these buildings was the Bolivar Museum. The museum is located in the house where Bolivar was apparently born, and some of the period furniture has been preserved and displayed the way they had been in Bolivar's youth.

Besides other artifacts, including utensils, manuscripts, and Bolivar's medals, the museum had large paintings and frescoes depicting the various stages and exploits of Bolivar's life—his marriage in Madrid to a woman who died of yellow fever only six months after their wedding, his great military victories against the Spanish, and, for me, the most intriguing of them all, his upbringing. Bolivar's mother died when he was a baby and he was brought up by a black nanny who seemed to have been a central part of his family life, present at key events as depicted in some of the large paintings I saw and discreetly photographed. She appears as the lone dark face in Bolivar's otherwise white entourage.

As I looked at these paintings, I recalled the point Alejandro had been making all along: the centrality of blacks in Venezuelan history, which is often silenced, is erased unless it is too obvious to do so as with this black woman who raised Bolivar. In fact, I was intrigued by an apparent conflict in the two narratives of Bolivar's birth—the one sanctified in the museum and repeated to me by Renaldo and reproduced in all official narratives, that Bolivar was born in the Caracas building where the museum is located; and the other told to me by Alejandro and Sanchez that Bolivar was actually born in a small town at his family's plantation in what was then part of the state of Caracas but was not the city of Caracas as such. As we drove from Barlovento, Alejandro pointed out the exit to Bolivar's birth place. They could not allow the nation's liberator to be born on a plantation surrounded by black people.

Bolivar's story in the liberation of South America from colonial rule raises, for an African historian, interesting questions. What was the import, the context, of this independence? Like North America, it was primarily the liberation of the settlers from their erstwhile imperial masters in Spain from where they themselves had originally come. It was not independence for the indigenous people, many of whom were decimated in a deliberate genocide, let alone for the Africans brought here in the chains of slavery. It was South Africa in 1910 when the white-dominated Union of South Africa was formed, not 1994 when apartheid ended and multiracial democracy was established. In many South American countries where the oppressed indigenous people still constitute a majority, they are still awaiting their 1994. In some countries where African-descended people constitute significant minorities, they are still awaiting independence with full civil rights and equality for all. Venezuela is one of these countries.

The last part of my tour with Renaldo was to an *Italo Cambio*, a foreign currency exchange bureau. Before visiting Venezuela, I had not been to a country where traveler's checks cannot be cashed at a hotel or a commercial bank. This certainly demonstrates Venezuela's indifference to tourism, and the tight financial control maintained over foreign currency transactions. We eventually found a *Cambio* after a considerable search. The tellers were extremely friendly; we bantered about teaching each other Spanish and English, respectively, but the transaction was extremely slow—it took more than half an hour and they even required, besides my passport, thumb prints to be taken. That done we drove back to the hotel and I paid Renaldo. The tour was not cheap—\$130 U.S.—but it was well worth it.

In the early evening, after 6:00 p.m., Alejandro was to pick me up for my three-hour seminar at the Universidad Bolivianiane de Venezuela, which is just across from Central

University. I was a little surprised that I was told I would be picked up at 6:00 when the seminar was scheduled to start at 6:00! As it was, we did not get to the campus until 6:45 p.m. He explained that many of the students were working people and they were often late so he usually started at about the time we arrived. Even then, there were only five students in the class of 20. He introduced me to them and asked me to talk about my research project as we waited for the rest of the students to turn up. I became quite animated and by the time I had finished the "filler gap" introductory remarks and answered their questions, it was 45 minutes later! Five additional students came in.

The topic of my presentation to the class was "The Historic Agenda of African Nationalism," in which I discussed the five tasks of African nationalism: decolonization, nation-building, development, democracy, and regional integration. It allowed me to give a broad overview of African historical and contemporary developments and ended with a discussion on the mutuality of interest between Africa and its diasporas. Alejandro, as far as I could tell, did an excellent job of translating, and where necessary, contextualizing my remarks. The students, he told me later were unusually enraptured. They all came to shake my hand and tried in their different ways to indicate that they had enjoyed and learnt immensely from the lecture. Alejandro said it was excellent — amazing in its breadth and depth of coverage and he expressed regret for the students who had missed it. The students asked many interesting and perceptive questions and we could have gone on deep into the night, but the seminar ended at 9:30 p.m.

Alejandro took me to a restaurant at a nearby hotel named Millennium. This is the hotel he had recommended I stay in, but I could not find its particulars on the Internet to make a booking. He recommended a fish dish that was delicious. During the meal, we continued discussing some of the issues I had broached in the lecture — the imperatives of Pan-Africanist intellectual solidarity.

We returned to the hotel the way we had come by the Metro — an impressively clean and apparently well-run system. It was interesting to see that at this time of night the Metro was full of young people, many going to some kind of party to celebrate the weekend and graduation. Oh, the life of the youth!

I arrived back at the hotel a little after 11:30 p.m. It has been a long but fulfilling day. The combination of the city tour and the university seminar was enriching.

Before going to bed I talked to Cassandra, discussed whether or not she should come to Brazil for a while when I am there, and Sally's call to the house looking for me — she wants to make a counter-offer. This is a time-honored tradition among competitive American universities, a feature of academic capitalism that often comes as a surprise to outsiders as it did to me when I moved from Canada in 1995. In this case, I wasn't sure I wanted a counter-offer. We agreed that she would make a final determination whether or not to come to Brazil.

June 24, 2006

This is the day of festivals in Afro-Venezuelan towns to mark the highlight of black history. It is also a national holiday to mark an important military holiday — the anniversary of the Battle of Carabobo, which led to the independence of Venezuela. In the evening, I saw President Chavez on TV address the nation at the rally grounds. He was on all the

Venezuelan TV channels. I couldn't make much of what he was saying of course, but he has a powerful, rich voice, is almost charismatic, and speaks with the deliberate, modulated, and dramatic emphasis of a seasoned orator. I wish I could have understood what he was saying, but I could pick out familiar phrases about imperialism, the United States, solidarity, and Simon Bolivar.

Alejandro sent a taxi to pick me up, which we had agreed I would of course pay for. The driver came at 10:00 a.m., as promised, but there was a little mishap in that he spoke no English and when he tried talking to me presumably asking if I was the passenger I didn't understand what he was saying, so I shook my head. I waited outside the hotel until he approached me again a quarter of an hour later and asked if I was Zeleza and was holding a phone with Alejandro on the line who confirmed that this was indeed the driver and we both laughed off the incident. Before we left, I had been talking to a Kenyan whom I had met several days ago in the elevator. He is based in Harare. He works with the World Health Organization and is here for a conference. When I told him what I was doing here he was surprised to hear that there are so many blacks in Venezuela, for he hadn't seen any of them. This was not surprising with him being secluded in conference proceedings in a five star hotel for probably the whole day, and maybe being taken out to a fancy restaurant by the hosts, among whom, as Alejandro said, black people were unlikely to be included. Clearly, the Africans who come here on such visits never see the other Venezuela, the country of African descendants. This made me even more convinced about the importance of my project, the need to publicize the African presence in these lands to the Africans on the continent. I will write a blog entitled "The Other Venezuela Many Outsiders Don't Know Exists."

I wish the Kenyan had accompanied me to the town of Curiepe where the festival in Barlovento was held. He would have been amazed at the sea of black faces, the African music, the body languages, and the revelry that was deeply marked by the cultural memories of Africa. On the way to Curiepe, we passed by Alejandro's house where we picked him up together with his son, Alex, and Alejandro's niece and nephew who were visiting. The niece was in grade nine and the nephew in grade eight; fine teenagers, both born in New York, who returned to Venezuela six years ago and both, especially the girl, understand and speak some English.

There was a long line of cars as we approached Barlovento, clearly of people going to the festival. It took longer to make up the last fifteen miles of the trip than the time we did on the highway after Alejandro's house. But finally we did get there and we were immediately greeted by a colorful spectacle of people singing and dancing in the streets, drums and singing blaring, and sweet smells of roasted meat, chicken, and sausages filling the air. It was hot, and the heat seemed to add to the frenzy. We walked across the narrow, packed streets, and I watched the crowds with absolute amazement at this display of Afro-Venezuelan cultural celebration, clicking away at my camera.

At one point, we entered the main hall where the ceremony would end later that evening. We bumped into a group of African Americans on a tour and talked and took pictures with them. Never one to lose an opportunity to promote inter-diaspora linkages, Alejandro invited them to visit his university. They were surprised to hear there was a black university nearby which nobody had told them about. Two of them were doing documentaries, one a doctoral student at Howard University, and the other a high school teacher in Atlanta, Georgia, who seemed very much like a small diva from her mannerisms. She was a graduate of Spelman College, she said.

We returned to join the street party and the dancing and singing and walked with the crowd. Around the town square there were kiosks selling artifacts and an ensemble of young boys, many not more than twelve or thirteen and some as young as six, playing drums; these would become the master drummers of future festivals, Alejandro said. We later saw the adult drummers do their thing. Alejandro explained that some of the drums used in the Curiepe festival were specific to the town. Other types of drums were used in similar festivals in other towns, a testimony to the rich diversity of Afro-Venezuelan musical culture.

Curiepe was founded in 1721; the first Afro-Venezuelan town founded by free blacks, some of whom had been in the military. Today's was a Catholic festival, San Juan, and Catholicism has been the main religion among the town's inhabitants since its founding. But it was Catholicism with a black face, deeply encoded with African religious practices, idioms, and symbols. The founders of the town, Alejandro explained, proclaimed allegiance to Catholicism because that was the only way their town could be given official recognition as a parish, but they retained the religious traditions of their African ancestors and origins. And so, there were two faces of saints, a white one, San Juan Bautista and a black one, San Juan de Congo or simply, San Juan Congo. It was the latter they mostly celebrated.

We went into the house where the shrine of San Juan was kept and from where it started its journey around the town last evening. The shrine is kept and maintained by women. Later we entered the house where the shrine was temporarily placed as it was taken around the town and I took photographs. Three beautiful young ladies stood beside the shrine, two on one side and one on the other. The shrine was placed on a mantel, below which was a wreath of flowers and burning red candles. Red seemed to be the color of the festival. The participants were dressed in red dresses and red T-shirts and occasionally wear red bandanas and caps; white dresses and shirts were also worn, but they too were embroidered with red materials. I bought myself a red bandana and a red cap that I promptly wore.

Before seeing the shrine, we stopped briefly by one of the grilling stations and bought ourselves some juicy and tasty roasted chicken. Then, as we left after being there at least three hours, we drove around the town, which Alejandro guessed, had about 10,000 inhabitants. The town was made up of narrow streets, compact one-story and occasionally two- and three-story houses made of brick and concrete. It reminded me of a slightly poorer version of old Mombasa. It was obviously an old town and, in parts, it wore its age well.

From Curiepe, Alejandro decided to show me the Caribbean coast nearby. We stopped at the small town of Guatire, which had once been an important rail hub, but was now a fishing village and popular with yachting enthusiasts. There was a large hangar serving as an indoor marina where boats of all shapes and sizes and colors were hoisted at different levels.

Alejandro and the kids wanted to go on a boat ride, but I chickened out and let them go, explaining that since I did not know how to swim I was not too keen to go out on such an open boat, just in case. They didn't insist and they left me behind. I spent the next two hours walking through the town, which was predominantly black, and watching people enjoy the sea. The rich ones with the expensive looking yachts and boats were mostly white-looking; those who came out of the open but roof-covered boats carrying up to twenty people seemed mostly Indian. They came with crates of water and soft drinks and large pots.

There were also those on the ski jets who delighted in showing off their riding skills on water and showing off their naked chests and biceps. But one was so fat and his elephant-like stomach was so grotesque to look at that one wondered why he was so keen to spoil the view of such tranquil and lovely scenery of calm waters with mountains in the background, part of the Alvile range that rises to great heights as it proceeds towards Caracas. And there was a man, who was also shirtless, who took special pleasure in playing with a toy motorized boat that he guided with an antenna as his wife looked on with boredom.

By the time we left Guatire, it was getting dark. On the way, the two teenagers, Alex and Alejandro himself fell asleep, so that it was deathly quiet in the car. When I was not lost in my thoughts of the festival in Curiepe and all I had seen since my arrival exactly a week ago, I watched people walking by shops or in front of their houses and occasionally along the road, relishing the cool evening air. I returned to the hotel about 9:30 p.m. after the taxi driver dropped off Alejandro and the kids. After dinner at the Terrace restaurant, I came back to the room after 10:00 p.m. and watched a little TV. Another long, memorable day where Afro-Venezuelan culture and society came alive in the festive streets, meat-roasting smells, drumming sounds, and the laughter and smiles of Curiepe.

June 25, 2006

I decided to rest and spent much of the day in the hotel. I talked to Cassandra in the late morning. She told me about Aaronette White's party which she said was a big dose of fresh air, although everybody did talk about Karim's tragic death. I ordered room service for a late breakfast and went to the restaurant on the first floor for dinner.

For the rest of the day, I watched some forgettable movies on HBO, read, and napped. It was blissfully restful after a week of running around!

June 26, 2006

I finally left Caracas for Higuerote in Barlovento where I will be based until I leave Venezuela. I was picked up by the same taxi driver, Celedeno, who took us to Curiepe on Saturday. We first went to an *Italo Cambio* to change money where again, it took forever. Thankfully, I met a British chap, a student at Oxford University, who is touring South America with his friends. They have been to Argentina, Colombia, and Peru. They will be here for a month before heading back to England to resume studies at Oxford. A cheerful young man who once worked with an NGO (non-governmental organization) committed to development and Third World debt reduction. You have to begrudgingly admire these young Europeans who go around trotting the globe for adventure. Of course, this same spirit led to imperialism.

After we left the *Cambio* we got caught in Caracas' legendary traffic jams and besides occasional polite conversations with Celedeno, my mind was largely focused on the e-mail message from Sally I had read earlier that morning before leaving the hotel. She pleaded with me, tried to reassure me how much she supported me, how invaluable I was to the department's future, to building its African diaspora and colonial history programs, and

that Penn State would meet all my requests, including a distinguished professorship, a research assistant, and increased salary and research funding, no problem! I was, of course, flattered and troubled by my chair's well-meaning entreaties, flattered at the affirmation of my worth, but troubled that it would make my decision to leave a little more difficult.

All of this of course is part of the game of the American academic labor market: in the absence of collective bargaining it's all left to individual bargaining in which one's marketability becomes the key weapon for career advancement. It's disgusting, even demeaning, but one has to learn to play the game to succeed in this ruthless culture of rankings and competition among universities, colleges, departments, and individuals. I certainly have learned to play it well and it gratifies me. My record of research and publications is clearly better than most, indeed, without it nobody would pay a small man from Malawi any mind.

We got to Higuerote in the early afternoon. I checked in but was told my room would not be ready for a while. That was only the beginning of what turned out to be a rather frustrating experience with the hotel. Apparently, the hotel was full over the weekend because of the San Juan Festival in Curiepe. Alejandro, Sanchez, and another colleague whose name I forget came by for lunch. It was great seeing Sanchez again and we greeted each other accordingly and tried to catch up on the last few days when we hadn't seen each other. The meal, as usual, became an occasion for an impromptu seminar during which I learned more about Afro-Venezuelan history and culture. The main point I got today is the difficulty of knowing for sure how many Afro-Venezuelans there are, for the national population statistics have not kept a racial breakdown of the population since colonial times. Alejandro, who has done work on the subject using the population distribution at the end of slavery and accounting for rates of births, deaths, and immigration, believes that the Afro-Venezuelan population accounts for up to 65% of the total. Andrews, in his book, *Afro-Latin America*, gave an estimate of 44% in 2000. I showed the book to Alejandro and he took great interest in it, but he thinks the Andrews estimate is too low. In my work, I will take Andrews' estimates, as I have no means of making another estimate. Alejandro's estimates provide the range of possibilities.

After lunch, I waited for a little while before my room was finally ready. My enthusiasm was dampened the moment the door was opened. It smelled musty and the walls were peeling and it all looked a little nasty. The bed cover had obviously seen better days; it was wearing thin and felt itchy. When I called reception to try to place a call to the U.S., I was told I couldn't do so: there were no external lines! The TV did work; indeed, it had more channels than at the Hilton, but no news channel in English. I even missed CNN! I felt tired and in need of a nap, having woken up unusually early at 4:00 a.m. and unable to go back to sleep, but the smell overwhelmed any desire for sleep. I went to the front desk to ask for another room, which was promised to me for later that evening. In the meantime, I asked for access to the Internet. It was a far cry from the Hilton cybercafé. The Internet was available on the only computer in the hotel reservation's office.

The reservation clerk, Susan Zapata, whose name I found out later, cheerfully allowed me to use the computer with Internet access while she went to the front desk. I checked my e-mail and caught up on the news with the papers I regularly read—Malawi's *The Nation*, South Africa's *Mail and Guardian*, Kenya's *Daily Nation*, the British *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, the American *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and the Canadian *Globe and Mail*, in that order. That was oddly reassuring in its apparent normalcy that made me for a while forget the smelly room and lack of telephone service. Susan even

tried to call from her line, without success, so I gave up on trying contacting Cassandra by phone. It's amazing that in a few short decades we have become so accustomed to instant communication, those of us based in the global North and in the cosmopolitan cities of the global South, so we fret so easily when we lose access. I recall in Jamaica and Kenya I didn't even have a house phone. In Kenya, I only got one the last couple of years or so before I left. And I grew up in Malawi without a phone and was none the worse for it!

After work at 5:00 p.m., Susan kindly offered to show me around Higuerote. She is a young woman in her early twenties, very pretty and charming, a recent graduate of Barlovento's black university. Her parents are originally from Colombia, but she was born in Venezuela. She considers herself a *morena*, mixed, neither black nor white, as she cheerfully put it. This is her first job, but her real ambition is to become a teacher, although she majored in marketing. Before she got this job at the hotel six months ago, she taught classes at her house with the neighborhood kids helping them with their homework. I later met some of the kids at her house when she took me there at the end of the town tour.

It is a black town, full of black people. It could be anywhere in Africa. It reminded me of Limbe in Malawi in its compactness and its narrow, packed streets, buildings badly in need of paint, and crowds waiting for public transport. A river runs through the town and discharges its dirty, murky waters into the sea nearby. Susan takes immense pride in her town, but she complained bitterly that the people should keep it a lot cleaner. I couldn't have agreed with her more. We walked to the beach where a few people were basking in the sun and others swimming; then to the rugged rocks where young men were spearing crabs with sticks. It was all so tranquil. From there the town looked serene, the hotels and apartment blocks that ringed the coastal line gave it an air of affluent geniality, which was a little deceptive. We then walked past the mayor's office, an arena where music events and parties are held on most weekends—Susan said people love to party here; every open space was a potential setting for a party. And they love their salsa and meringue.

There was a plaque on the mayor's office that indicated Higuerote was founded in 1891; the plaque also listed Curiepe, founded in 1721, and another town, also in the eighteenth century—the first three black towns in Miranda state.

After this, Susan took me to her house on a nondescript street whose houses looked, from the outside, rather run down. Her mother was sitting beside the door entrance, watching young boys playing in the street. Susan lives with her mother; she is an only child. Her father died several years ago. Her mother greeted me warmly as Susan introduced me as an African visitor staying at the hotel who she was trying to show around town. As we entered the open corridor, I noticed that the first room had about a dozen school chairs—that's where Susan used to conduct her classes with the neighborhood kids; the next two rooms had curtains serving as doors, and the next was the kitchen, followed by a room that served as the dining room, which then led to a small yard filled with mango and banana trees. It was all so modest, the furniture that I could see was rudimentary, and there was a puddle of water in the yard from last night's rain. But Susan was obviously immensely proud of her house as she was of her town, and she enthusiastically told her mother, who joined us at the dining room table, that I seemed to have enjoyed the tour of the town. Her joy and enthusiasm has a fresh, youthful touch that is utterly endearing.

She eagerly invited several kids who were peeping from the doorway to come in and meet me, the man from Africa. I, too, was keen to meet them. About five boys came in, and a girl stood by the door and watched us with a feigned nonchalance. These were among the kids Susan used to tutor, ranging in age from about nine to thirteen years old

and were in primary and lower secondary schools. They shyly introduced themselves. They were clearly curious but could not bring themselves to talk, so I broke the ice by asking them whether they had met an African before; they all shook their heads, saying no. I asked them what they had heard about Africa and whether they had any questions for me.

They asked about the animals, the weather, how people lived, what the kids were like, the music, the culture. The questions became more specific and more interesting as we talked; they clearly were intrigued by what I told them, the obvious similarities as well as the differences between their town and their lives and those of African towns of similar size and children of their age. Susan's boyfriend, who brought a bar of chocolate for Susan and another for her mother, found us in the midst of this impromptu class. He, too, appeared fascinated that I was an African visiting their small town, and Susan fondly implored him to practice his English, which he declined weakly. After the children left, they returned to playing basketball on the street, and Susan showed me her graduation photographs, describing the people in each, mostly her classmates, with pride as her mother and boyfriend looked on smiling. It was all so touching, so lovely.

Not to overstay my welcome I asked her to call me a taxi to take me back to the hotel. In the restaurant at the hotel there was a woman sitting by herself and a couple sitting with a child and an elderly man. When the waiter brought me the menu and it was clear that I was clueless and the waiter couldn't help with English translation, the woman and the couple both jumped up to come to my table to explain. The couple beat the single woman to it and so the former, who turned out to be an Italian husband and his Venezuelan wife, relished practicing their English by translating the menu. I settled on fish soup and a fish entrée. The couple apparently met ten years ago in Pensacola, Florida, fell in love, and got married. I didn't ask where they lived—Venezuela or Italy—but the man said something about the shorts he was wearing being ten years old since he only wore them a few times a year because of long winters in Italy, so I surmised they were visiting her family from Italy.

I retired to my room and fruitlessly searched for an English language news broadcast. When I couldn't find one, I settled for a film in English with Spanish subtitles. This is a great way to learn a language!

July 27, 2006

This is my last full day in Venezuela. It has been a memorable week and a half. It feels like I have been here much longer than that, so intense have been the experiences.

The day started with a visit to the campus where I was scheduled to give a talk. I thought the talk was scheduled at 9:00 a.m. and I had set my alarm for 8:00 a.m. and took a quick shower, shaved my head, and rushed to the reception to call for a taxi, all in about half an hour. I was on campus by 8:50 a.m. To my surprise and increasing concern, 9:00 a.m. came, and then 9:30 a.m., then 10:00 a.m. and Alejandro, in whose class I was supposed to be talking, was nowhere to be seen. I had seen Geronimo Sanchez as I got out of the taxi, and he took me to one room after the other. He tried to explain but I didn't understand what he was saying and as my patience wore thin I made no effort to understand. At one point, he took me to the language lab a floor above the seminar

room where my lecture was supposed to be presented. There I saw Roger Baker, the Trinidadian lecturer of English Language. No sooner had that brought relief than Geronimo took me back to the empty seminar room and just left me there. Fifteen minutes later, I went to look for a bathroom but there was no toilet paper in any of them! When I told Roger, he was embarrassed for the school; he pulled a roll from his desk. I surmised that is what everybody probably did. I was too pressed to feel embarrassed!

When I returned to the seminar room, well after 10:00 a.m., it was full. Alejandro was fiddling with the microphone in front of the room as the technician was checking the computer and what appeared to be a video recorder. Besides students and faculty from the school, the American tour group of African Americans and the European Americans we had met in Curiepe had come. I thought that would make for an interesting presentation and follow up discussion.

Alejandro graciously introduced me, noting it was an honor for the newly set-up African studies chair for me to be one of their first—did he say first?—guest presenter. We did not have time to discuss what I should talk about so I decided to present on the same topic as I did at his other class at Barlovento University in Caracas. The lecture was extremely well-received. They gave me thunderous applause when I finished, followed by good questions and animated conversation, and another round of applause. By the time the session finished it was noon. The Americans mobbed me for an e-mail contact address and they all said they were glad they came and they had learned so much. The enthusiasm of the Venezuelans was only dampened by their inability to talk to me directly in English and for me to talk to them in Spanish. Obviously, Alejandro had done an excellent job of translating the formal lecture and question and answer session.

I was particularly touched by his closing remarks in which he urged the Americans to see clearly and listen critically to the voices of the Venezuela they never see and hear in the U.S. where President Chavez is vilified and where the opposition, made up of the country's old discredited oligarchies, is deceptively portrayed as saviors of the country from the Chavez dictatorship. Truth be told, he insisted, this is the first government to take the interests of Afro-Venezuelans, indigenous communities, and the poor seriously. It is precisely for this reason that the Chavez government is feared and disdained by the oligarchies, and together with their right wing allies in the U.S., they are keen to reverse the achievements of the Chavez revolution.

In addition to Geronimo and Alejandro, Roger joined us for lunch at the hotel. Later, Roger confided in me that this was the first time he had been included in an Africa-related event. He was obviously concerned and unhappy about his exclusion; he charged that while both Geronimo and Alejandro were committed to African issues and were well-meaning as individuals, they had tended to monopolize Africa-related events and this, whether intentionally or not, pushed out people with interests in African issues who would otherwise actively participate. I was not quite sure how to read Roger's criticism, how to separate the angst of alienation that many foreigners tend to suffer—I should know—and the culpability of Geronimo and Alejandro in the matter.

The first day I met Roger he had alerted me to the fact that all black foreigners in his milieu in the town and on campus tend to be seen as Trinidadians and as escapees from political terror or poverty. This clearly irks him. It was from him I heard the festivities in Curiepe last Saturday were brought to an abrupt end that evening because of murder—two people were shot to death. According to Roger, killings and violence in the black community are common. He attributed it to the proliferation of guns and drugs.

Interestingly, when I brought up the issue of the killings in Curiepe last Saturday at lunch, Alejandro brushed it aside with a quick gesture of the lips and switched the subject.

Instead of the regular restaurant, we took our lunch in the bar where the TV was on covering the match between Brazil and Ghana. We all joked that this was a brotherly contest between Africa and the diaspora, so that it really wouldn't matter who won—it was all the same family. We turned on the game during the second half when it was already 2–0 in Brazil's favor. For the next half hour, we watched a spirited game in which Ghana put up a brave fight and had several near misses, but it was obvious the Brazilians were a superior team and they were very dangerous whenever they neared the Ghanaian goal. Sure enough, a Brazilian player dribbled his way past Ghanaian defenders and the goalkeeper and passed the ball into the net with triumphant ease for the third goal of the game. In the last minutes of the game my only concern was that Ghana not be humiliated with another goal, which came ominously close to happening a couple of times. As the players exchanged shirts, we all remarked on the fantastic play, the camaraderie among the players. We of course wanted to read a diaspora narrative of dialogic intimacy in the game, typically academic!

I spent the whole afternoon and the evening with Roger. I discovered he had lived in Caracas for about nine years before moving to Higuerote a year ago. While teaching, he is pursuing a master's degree with classes taught by instructors from a Cuban university—the University of Guantánamo—who come to Barlovento once every two or three months and spend two weeks offering intensive classes. This arrangement is apparently part of the trade-off in the alliance that Venezuela, under Chavez, has forged with Cuba whereby Venezuela provides oil and Cuba provides training and other services. Roger plans to enroll in a PhD program either under the same arrangement or in the U.S. once he finishes his M.A. in two years. He says he loves teaching, a career he turned to after working as an insurance salesman in Trinidad after he completed his bachelor's degree at the University of the West Indies, which he found dissatisfying. He is currently separated from his Afro-Venezuelan wife, whom everyone mistook for a Trinidadian because she is dark and she was married to him. They have seven-year-old twins, a boy and a girl, who currently live with their mother in Caracas. He talked of how much he loves his children, that they are the most important people in his life. He has another fourteen-year-old-daughter who lives with her mother in Trinidad.

We took a bartered taxi that drove us to several nearby black towns. The driver was a friendly, well-groomed Afro-Venezuelan, well-groomed in terms of his immaculately cut hair. The car must have been at least twenty-five years old, but he tried to keep it clean. It was scorching hot, but the back windows, where I was sitting, didn't open. It was not too bad once we were driving, for the breeze from the front windows did flow to the back. I had changed from the safari suit I bought incidentally in Trinidad in 2004, into a T-shirt I bought on a cruise that Cassandra and I went on in early 2001 when we toured Ocho Rios, Jamaica.

We visited five towns in all—Santa Eulalia, Garapate, Rio Chico, La Sortija, and San Jose, and one place better characterized as a village than a town. I took pictures in each of the towns while in the village Roger took a lovely picture of me and a grandmother and her granddaughter. The grandmother fretted about her appearance but I reassured her—through Roger's translation—that she looked fine. I asked her about what she knew and thought about Africa. She said not much, although of course she knew her ancestors were from Africa. The granddaughter insisted that they were Venezuelan. They

wondered why we were asking so many questions; and they loosened up considerably when Roger explained I was from Africa doing research on Afro-Venezuelans. The granddaughter put her arm against mine to compare our complexions; I told her she could be my sister and we all laughed. The grandmother, with a full head of white hair and several missing teeth, would probably have talked to me a bit more if it were not for the need for translation, but she did try. She reminded me of the old women in my mother's village, laughter and wisdom showing through their faces after many years and knowledge of the secrets to a happy life despite excruciating material poverty.

Save for differences in size and relative states of economic well-being, as reflected in the buildings, the towns shared two basic characteristics: they were predominantly black—in fact whites were barely evident—and had a similar architectural layout. At the center of each town is the square with wooden, concrete, or metal benches, flowers, and walkways. In the middle of the squares stands a statue of Simon Bolivar in different postures. On one side of the squares is the church, on the other the town council, and on another, the police or court house. The square is clearly the center of public life and political power where community events are organized and monitored, where culture and civility are performed and produced, where school children gather on their way from school and young lovers sit and cuddle, where older folk ponder their lives, and where the town's dwellers come to see and be seen by others. I was intrigued by these town squares and wanted to sit there for hours just watching people come and go, sit and saunter, chatting or silent.

At San Jose, Roger and I talked to a group of three teenage girls. Like the boys at Susan's house, they were fascinated by the fact that I was African and we talked about African culture and what Africa was like. They didn't know much about the continent but seemed genuinely interested to learn. In the same square, we came across a middle-aged black woman who was only too keen to talk. In fact, she approached us wondering what we were doing; I guess we looked like strangers. She was from Colombia and told us there were a lot of black people in Colombia, and insisted that there was hardly any discrimination against black people in Venezuela. She confessed she knew little about Africa, although she knew her ancestors came from there.

In Rio Chico, we went to the mayor's office. Roger knew the mayor and wanted to introduce me to him. Unfortunately, the mayor was not in but we were directed to the person in charge of cultural affairs in the town. Her name was Olga, a friendly, rather top-heavy woman who took enormous delight in our conversation. You could tell she was an Afro-Venezuelan nationalist; quite well-informed about Venezuelan and African issues. For her, Africa and its diasporas had a mutuality of interests; she commented on her split support during the Ghana-Brazil World Cup match, and noted that otherwise she always supported African teams and so did many other Afro-Venezuelans she knew. She turned out to be Geronimo's cousin. She estimated that 30%–40% of Venezuela's population was made up of Afro-Venezuelans, but it was difficult to be sure because separate statistics were not kept. She said hardly anything about Africa was taught in schools; it is only in cultural festivities, music, and dance that the African presence and contribution tends to be recognized. Among the Afro-Venezuelans themselves, colorism and phenotype distinctions are issues of concern.

At the end of each conversation, I took pictures with the people I had been talking with. We returned to campus to check on the photocopies that had been left last week; only three books remained to be photocopied. I paid for and collected the copies already

made. Roger and I went to return the original books and pamphlets to Geronimo and Alejandro and to bid them farewell. We hugged heartily and I thanked them for their assistance which made my trip so productive, so memorable. Geronimo kindly dropped us off at the hotel. After leaving the photocopied materials in my room, Roger and I walked to town. I went into an Internet café to make a phone call to Cassandra and to check my e-mail messages for the last time. There are Internet cafés on every corner—quite impressive indeed. Then I tried a little shopping, for CDs of Afro-Venezuelan music and of other Venezuelan music. I bought fifteen CDs, all pirated. Roger insisted that I look for T-shirts with logos of local places—Barlovento, Higuerote, Venezuela—anything that would remind me of my visit, as T-shirts are supposed to. None were to be found; instead the shops were full of T-shirts bearing brand logos of Hilfiger, Nike, and even Brazilian and German World Cup football players or their team logos. Clearly, tourism is not an important deal here, at least not the kind of tourism that produces and markets locality as part of the exotic memory of the tourist experience. I was luckier in my search for leather sandals. We finished the evening with dinner at a Portuguese-owned restaurant by the seaside. Then Roger walked me back to the hotel.

I was quite tired by the time I got to my room and did some packing before going to bed a little early—at 9:30 p.m. or thereabouts.

June 28, 2006

I woke up bleary-eyed because I hadn't been able to go back to sleep after Tiya's phone call last night. He just wanted to know how I was doing. I finished packing and went to the front desk to seek assistance in posting the books and materials I had collected to the U.S. I didn't feel like carrying them along with me to Brazil. Susan and her colleagues were extremely helpful and even drove with me and Celedano, who had come to pick me up at 9:00 a.m. as we had agreed, to the postal agency in town. Although the postal workers seemed to take forever to fill out all the necessary paperwork, I was moved by their friendliness and generosity. Susan gave me a good-bye hug and said she would write me and hoped I would write her back. She always called me Mr. Zeleza. It was so sweet.

Celedano and I left Higuerote at about 9:45 a.m. The traffic was unusually light in our direction so we hit Caracas two hours later. On the way, we exchanged a few words, and mostly listened to music from one station or another. On a few occasions, Celedano changed the station when they were playing a song I liked, but I didn't have the energy or inclination to ask him not to. By now, the road from Higuerote to Caracas had acquired some intimate familiarity. On the way to the airport through Caracas, we drove past the Hilton.

Seeing that the highway to the airport was congested, Celedano decided to take an alternative route through the mountains. We snaked through cluster upon cluster of the shanty houses that littered the way to the airport for miles. It became clear to me that these shanties, layers of make-shift houses piled on top of each other from the slopes to the top of the hills, house the vast majority of Caracas' population. Renaldo mentioned that 80% of the city's population was poor and lived in these neighborhoods. Once again, I revised my impression of Caracas. After miles of driving through these teeming slums with their narrow, steep streets that took people up and down the hills, and their clamor of busy humanity—shops, car repair shops, schools, doctors' and dentists' offices—we

descended to the highway below with smoother sailing to the airport. The landscape was different compared to the other side of Caracas on the way to Higuerote: the mountains were less spectacular, the vegetation more sparse, the soil was bare and red. Only the tunnels cut through the hills were long and impressive.

We arrived at the airport with plenty of time for my flight. Celedano and I bid each other farewell as amigos. The check-in was quick and efficient. The departures area was as open, spacious, and clean as I remembered the arrival hall was. It was also whiter, as far as travelers went. I have been struck by the whiteness of airports, the whiteness of airline passengers even in countries with predominantly black populations, including many in Africa—a testimony to national and international racial distribution of wealth and division of mobility. I will write a blog essay on the subject.

It turned out that our flight to Miami had been delayed by at least half an hour. I took a leisurely lunch at one of the airport restaurants where I ordered steak, but was given a plastic knife which proved ineffective for the job. Airport security, I was told, allows for no knives, no glass. In the end, they gave me a small kitchen knife to plow into the thick steak. Thank God I had lots of time to spare. After lunch, I spent the next hour in an Internet café checking e-mail and catching up on the news. The world was as miserable as ever.

The flight was uneventful. They showed a movie, *Last Holiday*, starring Queen Latifah and LL Cool J, which was a huge improvement from *King Kong*. Unfortunately, I had just watched that movie recently so I tried, to no avail, to catch some sleep. It felt strange to be flying back to Miami only to catch a flight back to South America. Clearly, either the travel agent who had booked the ticket was seriously geographically challenged, as many Americans are, or it was all part of an American capitalistic reflex to keep travel dollars with American airlines. Even stranger, there is no transit facility at Miami International Airport—we all had to clear customs and return to the departure hall. It is as if nobody would ever want to be in transit from God's own country. The loud political bantering that passes for political dialogue on CNN rudely reminded me that I had returned to the land of nationalist jingoism and imperialist self-absorption. It was both sad and sickening.

The only bright spot of the time in Miami was that I could use my cell phone. The voicemail was filled with messages, several from Sally and one from Babacar M'bow in Miami inviting me to be a plenary speaker at a conference on science and technology in Africa. I spent much of the waiting period talking to Cassandra and catching up on her trip to Washington, D.C.; events in State College surrounding Karim's death and Robyn's state of mind, and the strange silence from Grace Hampton, the new head of the department of African and African American Studies and other members of the department; and strategizing over Cassandra's forthcoming Chicago campus visit; and my response to Sally, who was expected to call during my transit. When her call came, I was non-committal. She asked how much UIC was offering in salary and research funds. She promised to talk to Susan Welch, the dean, tomorrow and I indicated I would try to check my e-mail over the next few days. Fortunately, or rather opportunistically, I was able to steer the bulk of the conversation to Robyn's tragedy, for I did not want to be drawn into making any promises. Unless Chicago is not forthcoming on Cassandra or departmental issues, we are determined to leave Penn State and State College for UIC and Chicago. It's no longer about money or recognition for me; it's about lifestyle.

The flight was full and mostly white. I couldn't find a place to put my carry-on luggage so I had to check it in front. I was placed by the window in the last row of seats. For the

first time in as long a time as I could remember, the person sitting next to me was actually black, a young African-American high school teacher in the Bronx, New York, who was going for holiday on her first visit to Brazil with her sister and her friend. Initially reserved, she opened up when she found out I was a college professor, and told me of her plans to go back to college and study for a PhD and become a college professor. She currently teaches English and loves it. After dinner, the usual miserable, overcooked and tasteless airplane fare, I fell asleep; so tired was I that neither the occasional air turbulence nor my twisted neck were enough to keep me awake as so often happens during overnight flights. Brazil beckoned, and that was a source of excitement, of the sweet dreams of anticipation.



Brazil

June 29, 2006

The plane landed at Rio de Janeiro International Airport on time at 8:30 a.m. Going through immigration was a breeze; no questions and a quick stamp of the passport and immigration form. In the baggage hall we were greeted by jazz music. Initially I thought it was piped music but later I saw a tall black man with sunglasses in one corner next to the duty free shop playing a saxophone. What a uniquely Brazilian welcome, I thought. It was unique in another way, too. Before leaving, our baggage was screened one more time. I changed some money and looked for a taxi stand, which fortunately was immediately in front of the door to the baggage hall. There were four or five booths of taxi companies; I booked with the one directly facing me. The two young women cheerfully spoke English and asked if I wanted to change money too—no commission they said. Unfortunately, I had already changed my money inside the baggage hall.

The taxi driver also spoke English; so did the attendants and waiters at the hotel. Unlike Venezuela, where it seemed hard to find people who spoke English, here everyone I meet, once they determine you are not Brazilian, try to speak English to you. Maybe it's because tourism is so much a bigger industry here than in Caracas. Or was it because, as the biggest country in South America, the Brazilians were more self-confident and felt less threatened by speaking English? Or perhaps, being the only Portuguese-speaking country in a hemisphere dominated by Spanish, on the continent, and English, in the Caribbean, multilingualism was an asset.

The trip from the airport to the hotel took nearly three-quarters of an hour, during which time I was exposed to different snapshots: the maze of highways and flyways, the vast sea on one side and the rocky mountains in the distance, the yachting club and the harbor, industrial sites and office blocks, and, as in Caracas, miles of red brick contraptions acting as poor people's houses that were piled on top of each other in the hilly highlands and congealed tightly together in the flat lands. But unlike Caracas, sections of these slums had a less desperate look and they were intermingled with what looked like decent townhouses, apartments, public schools, and shopping areas. As we got closer to the city, the Rio seen on thousands of postcards began to appear: high rise offices and apartments lining the coastline as far as the eye could see and, in the distance perched on a hill, the figure of a saint with his arms outstretched as if welcoming all the world to the delights and charms of the city below. It all looked so familiar and so different; familiar in the color and characters of the urban architecture, familiar in the composition of pedestrians walking the streets and dashing in and out of offices, restaurants, and apartments—they were black and white and many shades in between.

The hotel has all the desirable amenities and it's very clean. The room is of average size, the TV has BBC World, so I can watch the news, and a couple of English-language movie channels. The hotel has a phone that works and an Internet facility; in fact, the rooms are wired for Internet use. I need to get myself a laptop with Internet capabilities

for my future travels. I immediately took a long, hot shower and gave all the dirty clothes to the laundry for cleaning. By the time all this was done, it was 11:30 a.m. and I spent the next hour in the Internet room checking e-mail and reading the online newspapers. The copyedited version of the chapters in my new two-volume book, *The Study of Africa*, came from CODESRIA. This is going to be a fantastic book. I forwarded the chapters with the queries to the relevant authors.

After that, I went to have lunch, a simple lunch of grilled salmon, vegetables, and rice. The waiter, an elderly black man, tried so hard to speak English and when he discovered I was an African he wanted to know the Chewa words for "bon appetit" and "thank you." He was thrilled as he repeated after me and he tried to teach me some Portuguese in return. The young bartender, who seemed to be of mixed race, looked in bemusement.

I decided to take a short nap after I had called and left a message for Allesandra and Solomon telling them that I had arrived. I was awoken from my nap by Allesandra's call only half an hour later. She discovered that the hotel where I was staying was close by the university where she works; she could see me in twenty minutes. I quickly got out of bed and went to the lobby to wait for her. I was surprised to see her—she was white! For some reason when Solomon mentioned he had found a research assistant for me, a friend of his girlfriend, Flavia, I thought the person was black. But there was no awkwardness: Allesandra's enthusiasm and bubbly nature saw to that. She was keen to work with me, she said, although she hadn't done this kind of translation work before. I quickly decided that she would indeed be good.

Allesandra seemed very bright, had done research on my work and quickly understood the value of the project. She had a strong interdisciplinary background, having studied history, sociology, international relations, and business management. She appeared very methodical as well as we discussed how we would go about working on the project—she would draw up a program listing the research activities to be done, people to talk to, and places and institutions to visit. I was very impressed. She would clearly be an asset as a research assistant and as a tutor. She left an hour later and I returned to the room and finished reading the papers and magazines I had bought in Miami before going out for dinner and then retiring to bed early to catch up on two nights of inadequate sleep. I was ready for Rio and Brazil and for getting to know more about my people in this vast, fascinating country!

June 30, 2006

My first day in Rio started quietly. Allesandra came to pick me up at 11:45 a.m. We had agreed to meet for lunch and go over the schedule. She drives a small two-door car, whose make I can't remember now. She was excited to see me and talked a mile a minute; all I had to do was to make appropriate gestures and sounds that I was listening. She took me to a fabulous restaurant, *Porcão*, overlooking two rocky hills, the yachting club, and parts of the city. It was stunning. The restaurant was full of people watching the quarter-finals in the World Cup between Germany and Argentina.

I made the wrong assumption that since Argentina was Brazil's neighbor the audience would be rooting for them and so when Argentina scored the first goal I cheered and raised my arms only to find that only two others joined me; the rest were deathly quiet.

That seemed rather strange, for I thought Brazilians watched their games with raucous passion. Allesandra quietly explained that Brazilians did not want Argentina to win. True enough, when Germany scored an equalizer the room went wild. The power of regional rivalries trumping solidarity was in full display.

The food was fabulous. It reminded me of the Brazilian restaurant Natasha took me to in Atlanta last July when Cassandra and I visited her. I filled my plate with all kinds of fish and vegetables from the buffet table forgetting that the waiters would be going around the tables with additional food, including wide selection of meats. Everything was so delicious and I sampled more than I should have; I felt terribly stuffed.

Allesandra had done an incredible job. She had gone to the website of the *Conference on Intellectuals from Africa and the Diaspora* and identified and got contact information for seven key Brazilian intellectuals who were participants or who headed important organizations dealing with Afro-Brazilian studies and issues. She also had identified several relevant Brazilian research institutes and foundations in Rio itself as well as in São Paulo and Salvador, of which she gave me a print out—all ten pages of contacts! I was quite impressed and told her so. Clearly, she is well-organized and a good researcher. I found out more about her background and plans. She is 36 and divorced, had started in the academy and left for business. She and her then husband set up an Internet provider company in 1995 when the Internet was new, which they later sold to a much larger company. After this, she decided to return to the academy.

She was currently teaching as an adjunct at two universities, the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and a private university. She has an incredibly heavy teaching load of twelve classes and almost 40 contact hours. On top of that, she is studying for her PhD, or rather trying to convince a potential supervisor to take her on as a student. This lengthy patron-client apprenticeship can take up to two years before a professor agrees to take a doctoral student, she said. Despite its frustrations, it was important that she got her PhD in Brazil rather than going abroad because foreign qualifications are not highly regarded here. But she would like to take up a fellowship for a couple of years or so in the U.S. to establish contacts with foreign scholars. She believes strongly in the benefits of international scholarly collaboration.

It was a long and rather expensive lunch. This was a beloved tourist spot, she explained. She would arrange for us to visit the Rio-based institutes on Monday and Tuesday. In the meantime, she would be working on an extensive bibliographic search on canonical—she calls them paradigmatic—works, both old and new, on Afro-Brazilian history and connections with Africa. I was pleased with the state of progress thus far.

I decided to spend the rest of the afternoon exploring my new surroundings on foot. She had warned me to be careful, certainly to avoid walking with gold jewelry, including my watch. I had been given the same warning by Geronimo and Renaldo, the taxi driver in Caracas where I had stopped wearing my gold chain and bracelet. Now, at Allesandra's insistence, I left my watch in the hotel. Copacabana, the neighborhood where my hotel is located, is the tourist heart of Rio and it is full of thieves, tourists, old people, and gay people, she explained.

Just a block away from the hotel is the beach and the highway that circles around it, and also the walkway of white and black-owned stores and rows of hotels and apartments that make up the picturesque postcard of Rio. I walked on the walkway, reportedly the scene of the world's largest New Year's Eve celebrations with up to two million people, for almost the entire length from Avenida Princesa Isabel—the street where my hotel is

located—to the corner where the Sofitel Hotel is located. It is strikingly beautiful. To my right were the two multi-lane, one-way boulevards and the row of hotels and apartments, and to the left were the long and deep golden sand beaches, lapped by the clear blue waters that occasionally erupted into brilliant white waves. People were swimming, playing games—mostly football or basketball—running, or just walking around the beach. Others were sitting or standing beside numerous kiosks that line the walkway. The walkway itself was a veritable collection of all manner of people—locals and tourists, men and women, young and old, whites and blacks. I could only imagine how crowded it must be on weekends, on holidays, and on very hot days. The temperature was a mild 21° or 22° Celsius (about 70° Fahrenheit). Police posts were discreetly tucked in between the two boulevards, where several Petrobras gas stations and bus stops were also located.

On a couple of occasions, I stopped to admire huge sand sculptures of fish and swimmers and sun-bathers. At one place, the sculptor proudly posed beside his creations for a photo by an overweight tourist and her grumpy-looking teenage daughter. At another point, I stopped to buy a coconut and a bottle of water from an Afro-Brazilian woman who seemed bemused that I could not speak Portuguese. On the way back, I walked on the other side of the street in front of the rows of buildings. There were numerous restaurants and outdoor cafés, a few of which were full, and in almost all of them people were watching the World Cup match between Italy and Ukraine. I occasionally took a peek to check the score. I returned to the hotel two hours later. By then it had gotten dark. I returned to the streets to look for an Internet café as the one Internet computer in the hotel was not working when I tried to reply to e-mail messages. There are Internet cafés everywhere. It was after 8:00 p.m. when I returned and went to the restaurant for my dinner. The food was a far cry from the sumptuous lunch this afternoon.

July 1, 2006

I decided to go the hotel restaurant for breakfast for the first time since I started the trip, more out of curiosity than hunger. Surprisingly, the restaurant which had been empty the evenings I have eaten there, was quite full. The breakfast itself was the usual fare of breads, cereal, fruits, cakes, eggs, sausages, juices, and hot beverages. Several hours later, I stopped by a restaurant for a snack, again, more also out of curiosity than the need to eat. Most of the people in the restaurant were watching the World Cup match between Portugal and England. No prize for guessing which side they supported. Everybody was of course eagerly awaiting the Brazil-France game at 4:00 p.m. Solomon had called earlier in the morning to suggest that we go to one of the samba school halls to watch the game.

I left for Solomon's place, actually Flavia's home, the friend he is staying with, at 2:15 p.m., and fifteen minutes later, I was there. The apartment is in Lagoa, an affluent neighborhood surrounding the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon where the trendy elites live. Flavia is a friendly woman, probably in her early thirties, with an easy smile. She is a little on the heavy side, and we hit it off immediately. As I had suspected, she was white, and, as I later learned from Solomon, was from the elite. She works for Citibank and is fluent in English. I wasn't quite sure of what to make of Solomon's relationship with her—I thought he had once said to me she was his girlfriend, but then as we were going to the apartment he talked about his girlfriend in Washington, D.C. who was asking when he was planning

to return. Later, I learned he had been with his D.C. girlfriend for more than five years and she was from the Gambia and worked for the airline industry. He said what he most appreciated about her is that she did not push him for marriage, although his relatives constantly asked him why he had not yet married such a fine woman. It was clear that Solomon loves life too much to settle down. He said he got divorced from his first wife ten years ago and, not in so many words, he made it clear he enjoys the amorous attention of Brazilian women, especially the mulattoes, as he put it. When we were walking in one of the *favelas* (as the shanty towns are called) he would point to any woman sauntering with an ample behind and comment, see that? At first it sounded harmless, but the joke wore increasingly thin and he could tell I was getting uneasy.

Before we left Flavia's apartment, the three of us watched the remaining part of the game between England and Portugal. We stood in the kitchen watching a black and white TV. It was quite evident that Flavia loved this throwback to an almost forgotten era; she had been given the TV by her grandmother. The furnishings in the rather compact apartment bore the antique look that the well-to-do like as a sign of old possessions acquired with old money. Being on the eleventh or twelfth floor, the view in the front of the apartment was blocked by another apartment. But on one side there was a great view of a hill where monkeys apparently appear from time to time, and on another side we could see a slice of the lagoon and the apartment buildings surrounding it.

The last minutes of the England-Portugal game were heart-wrenching. Since the two teams had failed to score even during extra time, the match was decided by penalty kicks. I was rooting for Portugal solely on the basis that I so dislike England, the colonial master of my homeland. We all cheered when England failed to score one of the penalties, followed by Portugal scoring one. This feat was repeated one more time, giving Portugal a 3-1 victory. We thought this was a good omen for the more important match due to start in less than an hour.

Flavia drove to watch the game at one of her friend's while we took a taxi to Mangueira. Like Alessandra, Flavia said she didn't care too much for football except for the World Cup. I wondered to myself, was one an expression of class exclusivity and the other of national patriotism? Football in Brazil is largely played by the poor, but patronized by the elites as a symbol of Brazilian greatness because Brazil has won the World Cup five times, more than any other nation. For the poor, many of whom are black, football is a gateway to wealth and class mobility.

Mangueira is on the northern side of Rio, on the other side of the Concorado Mountain on whose pinnacle Rio's famous statute stands. It is a large neighborhood, an old settlement established by slaves as a safe haven from the slave plantations of the old Rio on the other side of the mountain. As a favela it is a complex mixture of one-roomed shacks, mostly built of brick, in addition to larger dwellings, shops, and a busy street life. Unfortunately, we did not stop, for there were no people gathered at the samba school to watch the game. Solomon was a member of this school, which meant he could participate in their parade during the carnival. Each favela has its own samba school whose membership could be in the thousands, sometimes up to five, six, or more thousands. The carnival, held every February, lasts four days. The samba schools compete in three categories—Special for the best, Group A, and Group B. Recently, a Group C had been added. The last in each group would be demoted to the lower group for the following year's competition and the best in the lower groups would be elevated to the group above. The samba schools are elaborate training centers for the carnival—they train musicians including percussionists

for the all-important drumming, costume makers, directors, etc. — as well as powerful social forums for community life.

Solomon remarked cynically, but correctly, that the black poor have been held under control in Brazil by football and the carnival. Their anger has been repressed, for the eternal comfort of the ruling elites, and channeled into leisure and revelry. I found Solomon's observations on the Afro-Brazilian situation quite fascinating and insightful. He noted that the economic division between blacks and whites has not fundamentally changed since the abolition of slavery in 1888; that the ideology of race-mixing is used to camouflage profound and persistent racism. He recounted a documentary film produced by an Afro-Brazilian musical icon who interviewed seventeen young gang members in the sambas, showing their harrowing lives of utter hopelessness in which even the very young expected to die any time and expressed little concern at such a prospect. By the time the documentary was shown, all but four of the young interviewees were dead. I told him I would like to see the documentary.

From Manguera we drove, with the same taxi driver to Vila Isabel, another favela that looked less desperate than Manguera and had an ample supply of shops and restaurants, at least judging from the place where we spent the next several hours. The Samba School of Vila Isabel was the carnival champion of 2006, and both the inside and outside of the school hall was brightly decorated to attest to the fact. Before we got into the packed hall, which must have held at least 5,000 people, we bought drinks and some barbecue meat. Hundreds of people were milling around outside the hall. Solomon indicated the hall of the Manguera Samba School is even larger — it can hold up to 10,000 people.

The mood in the hall was electric with excitement and anticipation. Any time a Brazilian player got hold of the ball the crowd would cheer, and when they were close to the French side, frenzied cries of satisfaction would rock the hall. We stood in the back watching either of the two giant TV screens mounted on top of the raised platform where the samba drummers practice. Most of the people were dressed in T-shirts bearing the names of the Brazilian players. But the longer the game went on the clearer it became to me and to Solomon, as we whispered to each other, that the Brazilians were being outplayed and outclassed by the French team. We joked how the French team was all, save for a couple or so players, black or African. We called it the French colonial team. By half-time neither side had scored. At half-time the hall broke into loud and ecstatic music and dancing by a troupe of pretty, young women dressed in colorful, suggestive skirts that left little to the imagination. The way they wiggled their waists, shuffled their feet, swung their arms, and shook their bodies, and smiled harkened to the vigorous and enchanting dances of many an African society.

The second half of the game was even worse for the Brazilian side: the "colonial" French team was in total control and before long they scored as close to a perfect goal as is possible; that is, the Brazilian goalkeeper could simply not save it. Solomon explained that this was the first black goalkeeper in more than 50 years — the last one, in 1955 or 1950, had allowed Brazil to be beaten by Ecuador. Blacks were not trusted to be goalkeepers until now, yet black players were idolized and they went on to win five World Cups for Brazil. The insanities and inanities of racism manifest themselves in bizarre ways. The Brazilian team never recovered and, as the minutes ticked away, the crowd became quieter, only to come back alive when a new player was brought on the Brazilian side and become livid whenever the camera showed the face of the Brazilian coach whom they cursed with the most abusive expletives imaginable. A few minutes before the game ended, crowds began trickling out,

and when the final whistle blew, a hush fell over the huge hall. I am sure the stunned silence was repeated throughout the agonized nation. I saw a few people cry. We all shuffled out quietly. Solomon joked that I had missed the biggest party of my life. Had Brazil won, the whole city, the whole country, would have erupted into a head-splitting orgy of celebration. Brazilians worship their winning team. They desperately wanted to avenge their defeat by France in the World Cup finals of 1998. Now it was not to be.

Fortunately, Solomon suggested that we linger around on the roadside beside the hall. One side of the road was closed to traffic, so we sat on the edge next to vendors selling barbecued meat and drinks. I am sure all of them and the restaurant and bar owners were cursing the loss for what could have been a night of roaring business had the team won. This is the time Solomon shared with me his intriguing observations of Brazilian society. Much of it was prompted by the presence of heavily armed police standing outside their patrol cars just a few feet away. Solomon started by telling me how brutal and trigger-happy the police were, how they targeted black communities and often knew no boundaries between police authority and personal score-settling. As if to unnerve the police, some bystanders blew their loud firecrackers nearby. But the police looked unperturbed, their fierce guns held tightly.

Before we left, Solomon took me to a drug store to show me another face of Brazil: how readily available and reasonably cheap medicines are compared to in the U.S., where one also requires a doctor's prescription. When I got back to the hotel, I saw yet another face of Rio. In the restaurant where I went to eat near the hotel, I was accosted by two prostitutes, both black, and the waiter even tried to persuade me to succumb to the temptation. The male waiter was also black. And as I left the restaurant, just a few feet away from the entrance of the hotel, was a group of these ladies of the night. Most of them were black, or as Solomon would put it, mulatta and black. It was a sad sight to end a long day.

July 2, 2006

I took the day-long city tour of Rio offered through the hotel by one of the tour companies. The number of places that we actually stopped and walked around were few—Concorado Mountain where the statue of Jesus stands, the national stadium, the Sugar Loft Mountain, and the National Cathedral. We saw or drove through the entire city, and what a journey it was!

The city is really divided into two parts by Concorado Mountain, the older, poorer, northern part and the newer, richer, southern part. The differences between the two sections in terms of architectural styles, size and conditions of the buildings, nature and cleanliness of the streets, the color of the residents and pedestrians, even the state and make of cars, was amply evident. The buildings and the people got whiter the deeper we went into the newer part of Rio and they were grayer and darker as we swirled through the older parts.

The bus contained people from different hotels in the Copacabana district. There were about two dozen passengers, the driver, tour guide, and video-recorder. As can be expected, there was one prima donna among us: a heavy American woman with long—down to her waist—curly hair, who complained that she had been told by her hotel that she would

be getting up the mountain to the Jesus statue by cable rather than a van to which we were transferred when we got to a height too high for the bus. She said she would be lodging a complaint later with the owners of the tour company. The tour guide, an affable, chubby black man (probably considered mulatto here), advised her to complain with her hotel that had misled her, for this tour company did not operate tram cars up and down the mountain.

The mountain is thickly forested in parts, and serves as a park with walking and riding trails. When we got to the top, the place was swarming with tourists. From the languages I could make out, they were mostly from Rio or other parts of Brazil, there were considerable Spanish-speaking tourists as well. English was a distinct minority language, mostly spoken with an American accent. Among a handful of black people, I saw a woman, who spoke with a Caribbean accent, and her daughter, who looked to be Natasha's age, who spoke with an American accent. There was a scattering of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian tourists who spoke a motley of Asian and European languages. On our bus, there were four young British men of Indian ancestry.

The statute is an impressive piece of sculptural engineering. It was commissioned in 1922 to mark Brazil's century of independence. Designed by Brazilian and French architects, construction began in 1926 and ended in 1931. Over the years the site has undergone several innovations, the latest being the addition of the elevator in 2003 from the base of the mountain to the top where the statute majestically stands commanding a view of the whole of Rio. This is the highest point in the city, 700 meters from sea level, if I heard the tour guide correctly. The views of northern and southern Rio are incredibly spectacular. From there you can glimpse the shimmering sea and the Blue Mountains stretching in the distance as far as the eye can see.

This turned out to be a day of superlatives. The stadium, the largest football stadium in the world when it was built in 1950 for that year's World Cup, has also undergone several renovations, the latest of which gives it a seating capacity of 180,000, or so I thought I heard from the tour guide. We stopped adjacent to the statue that stands in front of the massive stadium. The statue is of Hilderaldo Luiz Bellini, the captain who led Brazil to its first World Cup victory in 1958 during which the young 17-year-old Pelé began his legendary World Cup football career. Emblazoned on the pillar holding the statute is a listing of the other years Brazil won the World Cup. We did not go into the stadium, the tour guide said it was too big for a short visit, more likely it was closed, I thought. From the stadium we drove back to Copacabana for lunch—three hours had already passed. Lunch was served in a fabulous steak house not far from where I am staying. It was another sumptuous meal of all types of meats, with an ample supply of choice salads, rice, plantains, fries, and breads. I chose the plantains to supplement the meat and salad dishes. The American diva looked thoroughly pleased and tamed by all the food, which she gorged heartily.

Our next stop was the Sugar Loft Mountain complex. Two mountains connected to each other at the peaks and to the ground by cable cars. I had a few misgivings about taking the cable car, but it was a smooth ride and over before I knew it. Each car carried about 70 people—I thought that number would have to be reduced in fat America. We saw stunning views of the newer, richer Rio, the three golden sand beaches, blue, green, and turquoise waters and white waves, including the Copacabana beach. From the two mountains, you could also see the business district with its gleaming banks and corporate affluence. The favelas had disappeared. This was the Rio of postcards, which the Brazilian

bourgeoisie love to show to the world, and where they live in gated fantasy and fear from the huddled masses of the favelas. Solomon said yesterday that Flavia and her well-heeled friends never go to the favelas.

By then I had started talking to the young man who sat next to me the whole morning, a Briton who works with a human rights organization in Bolivia. He was a medical officer. We had a good talk about the human rights situation in Bolivia, which he thought had improved since the election of President Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous leader. We also talked about the Iraq war, the lies that were told, and the fact that neither George W. Bush nor Tony Blair had really paid any price for it, and about the shenanigans of the world development industry. He was planning to study for a PhD in Development Studies at Sussex University and eventually work for the United Nations Development Program. An earnest young man, who would probably be swallowed by the development industry and make not much of a difference in the end. I somehow felt sorry for him.

We spent an hour and a half on top of the two mountains which have the necessary tourist facilities—clean bathrooms, coffee and snack shop, gift shop, and of course these incredible views of a picturesque Rio. On the second hill, I bumped into a young woman wearing a Pennsylvania T-shirt who turned out to be a recent graduate of Penn State. She graduated this past May and majored in Spanish. She had been on a three-country, month-long tour of South America. I teased her that it must have been her parents' final gift to her for good riddance. She nodded, laughing. She leaves tomorrow to start work in Princeton, New Jersey. It must be nice traveling the world like this at so young an age. She was on our bus.

I also talked to a couple who had been on a 75-day tour of the world beginning in China, through Austria, where the man is originally from, to South Africa's Kruger National Park, from Egypt along the Nile to the Aswan, to Canada to visit their daughter in Toronto, and now in Brazil before heading for the U.S.—San Diego. They were from Australia, both in their mid-sixties. He did much of the talking in his thick German-accented English and she would nod appropriately. They had been prematurely retired when their manufacturing company relocated to China, to their dismay, but were grateful for that turn of fortune, for they were now able to see the world and have the best time of their lives. I thought of my father. Sure, he travels around Southern Africa, which is an unusual privilege for someone of his age and means, but not around the world like this couple. Like the young white man from Britain and the young white woman from Pennsylvania, this elderly white Australian couple, strode around the world as if they owned it—a testimony to the privileges of wealth and whiteness.

Our last stop was at the cathedral built in 1976 in the business district, a massive structure built like a pyramid. Inside, it has colorful frescoes and rises up several stories to the roof, a sight that was probably intended to be awe-inspiring. Alongside the church is the Petrobras building, built like an oil rig. On the way, we passed through the aqueduct built in the 18th (or did the tour guide say the nineteenth century), which separates the old colonial city from the modern city of downtown Rio. By the time we returned to our respective hotels, it was nearly 6:00 in the evening.

Undoubtedly, the tour was well worth it. As with most such tours, all one really gets is an overview of the city's physical outline and little of its social dynamics, its complex history. We heard from the tour guide snippets of Rio's history; about the Portuguese who founded the city in the early sixteenth century and gave it its name because they thought the estuary where they had landed in January was a river because it was calmer than the sea they had sailed from, hence, *Rio de Janeiro*, the River of January. Nothing

was mentioned about the African slaves who built the cities and the country's economy, the indigenous peoples who were massacred, and the long history of racial and class exploitation and discrimination. It was as if the northern and southern parts of Rio just willed themselves into being.

I had dinner in the restaurant where I was the only hotel guest, after which I talked to Cassandra who was distraught, having visited Robyn at her house for the first time since the great tragedy. Robyn's parents were there; neither of them apparently said much. Then it was time to watch the news after a fruitless search for a film. All in all, quite a fascinating day.

July 3, 2006

Last night I found several messages from Allesandra, who had been trying to get a hold of me. When I returned her call she indicated that last Friday she had been unable to set up any appointments for today given that Fridays are rather difficult days to get people in their offices, and also that the universities have closed for the holidays. So she indicated that she would be making further contacts today and would get in touch through the course of the day. When I hadn't heard from her by late morning, I called Solomon, who was still asleep. We talked again around 1:00 p.m. and agreed to have lunch, but were unable to meet because he gave me the wrong address.

The walk from the hotel to the rendezvous with Solomon gave me an opportunity to walk through parts of Copacabana with its maze of shops, restaurants, hotels, and apartments. The walkways are all made of the black and brown stone one finds along the beach walkways on Avenida Atlantic. The broad three- to four-lane streets are mostly one way. They were clogged with traffic, including the ubiquitous blue and yellow taxis and the buses and minibuses that drive as fast as they do on a highway, despite the pedestrians.

After walking for more than an hour, I decided to have lunch in a rather deserted restaurant near the beach where they were serving a brunch that you paid for according to weight. I picked a salad and fish that turned out to be exceptionally delicious. I decided to walk back to the hotel instead of taking a taxi, partly to watch the crowds, and partly for exercise; I feel I have been eating a little too much and my stomach is beginning to bulge, so I need all the exercise I can get. This is one of the beauties of cities—you can walk aimlessly and nobody notices, let alone cares; and the energy of the traffic, the crowds, and the compact buildings provides a wonderful source of distraction and purposeless preoccupation. Strangely, it was like walking in Nairobi with all the news vendors on the road sides, the kiosks in front of some of the shops, the queues waiting for buses and the minibuses, and the mixture of peoples. In Rio there were none of the SUVs that clog American streets even in the small towns like State College. Solomon explained to me last Saturday that three forms of energy are used for automobiles in Brazil—petroleum fuel, gas, and ethanol. Energy conservation seems to extend to keeping many of the buildings dark at night—at least that's what I have observed from the hotel window of my room. During the walk I saw a least four destitute men, all black, scavenging garbage cans. Two were talking to themselves, apparently oblivious to the world around them. A woman walking besides me pointed to her head suggesting they were mad. Their presence was a powerful mockery of the abundance readily evident along the streets.

When I got back to the hotel, almost three hours after I left, my soles were hurting; I had worn the sandals I bought in Barlovento. I called Solomon on his cell phone who apol-

ogized for giving me the wrong street address. This time we agreed that he would come to the hotel, for he was still in Copacabana. He arrived half an hour or so later and we went to several shops where we stopped. Many of the shops had an excess of football-related merchandise that they would now have to get rid of probably at a heavy discount since Brazil had been eliminated from the World Cup. We ended up at a shopping arcade with dozens of vendors selling clothes directly from factories where prices are quite reasonable.

Solomon took me to a shop where he had bought his Gambian girlfriend in the U.S. an elaborate evening gown. The woman in the shop recognized him and he proceeded to happily show her a picture of his girlfriend wearing the gown at a military awards ceremony where Solomon's nephew, a U.S. Marine, was receiving an award for his service in Iraq. He proceeded to buy two new gowns. He obviously enjoys shopping and he took such a long time in the shop that I had to try hard not to show both my fascination and irritation. I had a sneaking suspicion that his shopping spree was also motivated by guilt, to placate her for being away for so long with another woman, or women, in Rio.

By the time we parted ways it was getting dark and was close to 7:00. He encouraged me to take a bus which passed by the hotel. I had not taken a city bus in ages, probably since 1990 when I left Nairobi. He hopped into a taxi back to Flavia's. Instead of going to the restaurant, I decided to order room service and eat while watching TV. I found a message from Allesandra and when I called her back she said she had arranged two meetings, one for tomorrow morning and the other for Thursday afternoon.

July 4, 2006

Allesandra came to collect me at 9:45 a.m. for the offices of the Palmares Cultural Foundation. Before we left, she showed me the literature searches she had done and gave me the folder containing some of the key studies I ought to buy; they are both in English and Portuguese—the former can be ordered from Amazon and the latter we will buy locally. She will read the ones in Portuguese and provide me with summaries, and later send me the books for the day I can read Portuguese.

The offices of the foundation are located downtown in the heart of the business and administrative districts. We were warmly greeted by Eliane Borges da Silva, a black woman probably in her early forties, who looked remarkably like one of my cousins except for her weight. She was a gold mine of information. My only regret was that I don't speak Portuguese, but her command of English was sufficient for a meaningful conversation and whenever her English faltered, Allesandra translated her Portuguese. She gave us materials, including a video tape, on the activities of the foundation, which is attached to the Ministry of Culture. The foundation was founded in 1988. It is based in the federal capital, Brasilia, and has branches in Rio, Salvador, São Paulo and other regional centers. Its mandate is to formulate, implement, and execute national programs and projects that recover, preserve and promote the cultural values and practices of Africans in the foundation of Brazilian society and to facilitate the development of policies by the ministry that give direction and opportunities for Afro-Brazilians.

Specifically, the Foundation is expected to undertake the following activities: the discovery and development of *quilombo* communities (once discovered and recognized the quilombo communities are eligible for state support, which is important in the recovery of Afro-Brazilian history in general and the history of Afro-Brazilian resistance in particular);

developing national systems of cultural information; preserving the historical, artistic and archaeological patrimony of Afro-Brazilians, both material and immaterial; building human resources capacity for the cultural patrimony of Afro-Brazilians; formulating cultural projects for Afro-Brazilians; implementing a communications strategy; promoting Afro-Brazilian cultural exchanges; and constructing a National Black Cultural Information and Reference center.

The foundation is expected to promote its activities across government ministries by sponsoring specific activities in communities and schools, promoting awareness campaigns in the media from radio to television, and by producing documentary films and organizing seminars, conferences and exhibitions on Afro-Brazilian culture and issues related to racism and racial integration.

The foundation works closely with various public agencies and institutions, especially the Secretariat on Diversity and the University of Education following the passage of a law in 2003 mandating the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian histories in schools. It also works closely with NGOs. It's only under the Lula government that the foundation's potential has started to be realized; although it remains under-resourced (for example, Ms. da Silva manages the Rio office almost single-handedly). There is need by the black community to use the resources more and increase demand that the foundation and the government implement their policies and deliver their promises, she stated.

Overall, Ms. da Silva said black activism has increased. Among black academics, a Black Academics Association was formed and will be holding a congress in September in Salvador. Black academics are increasingly insisting that they take prominence in the study of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, a field that has been dominated by white scholars. The policy of affirmative action for admission to federal or public universities has been a source of great controversy and conflict, but it has brought discussions about race in Brazil, long hidden in the discourse of race mixing, to the fore. Many white academics are opposed to quotas in university admissions and some have been waging petition campaigns, but the policy has increased the number of black students and encouraged some who previously did not consider themselves black to identify as black.

The result of affirmative action policies and increased discourse on race has been to raise the proportion of the black population statistically to 15% from 6% in the 2000 census, as well as more positive forms of black consciousness. Ms. da Silva noted how she herself previously self-identified as *pardo* but now considered herself black. She insisted, however, that severe challenges remain. The black movement is fragmented; black academics and intellectuals are split along ideological lines and few are located in the better funded and more prestigious public universities—most are in the private universities. The centers that focus on Afro-Brazilians still provide limited spaces and access to black Brazilian academics and intellectuals. There is only one specifically black university.

Afro-Brazilian society is extremely diverse in terms of culture and class. Afro-Brazilians are unevenly distributed across the country, with Bahia and Salvador claiming the largest relative concentration, while in other parts of the country the Afro-Brazilian presence is negligible or relatively invisible. Class differentiation among Afro-Brazilians has largely been affected by access to education. The black elite is relatively small, confined to entrepreneurs and entertainers (football players, musicians, and TV and film actors). This elite has little access to real assets and capital that dominate the Brazilian economy, even in predominantly black cities or regions such as Salvador and Bahia. Much larger is the black middle class, consisting of public and private sector employees and professional oc-

cupations. But the vast majority of Afro-Brazilians belongs to the working class, the working poor, and the unemployed who live in the suburbs (as the favelas are sometimes called). Ms. Da Silva pointed out that Copacabana, for example, has a large black middle class, while Mangueira and Vila Isabel, where I went last Saturday with Solomon, are suburbs for the working class, the working poor, and unemployed. In the more affluent Leblon and Ipanema, there are far fewer blacks.

As for knowledge of Africa, to most Afro-Brazilians, indeed to Brazilians in general, Africa is shrouded in mythology and stereotypes, she said. Little of Africa's history is known except for the fact that the ancestors of the Afro-Brazilians were sold into slavery from Africa. Contemporary images of Africa are often derived from the North American and European media and Africa is seen as a land of poverty, violence, and disease. While Afro-Brazilian activists are aware of Africa's complex realities, there is need for broader and more popular engagements between African countries and institutions in Brazil, and with Afro-Brazilians in particular. These engagements need to go beyond periodic conferences such as the one next week in Salvador. Afro-Brazilians also have limited knowledge of and engagement with other African diasporas in the Americas. This is partly a problem of language—Brazil is the only Portuguese-speaking nation in a region dominated by English and Spanish. Also, many of the diasporan Africans who come here, say from the U.S., come only as tourists. This is not often designed to promote meaningful cultural interaction. Again, this is an area in need of broader and deeper exchanges.

We could have gone on. We agreed to meet again on Friday during which time Ms. da Silva promised to take us to a restaurant that serves typical Afro-Brazilian dishes developed during the days of slavery. We left almost two and a half hours later and Allesandra, who was clearly excited by the conversation from which she said she had learned a lot about her own country, showed me around some of the historic sites in the city center including the imperial palace, which was built when the Portuguese king relocated to Brazil in 1808 after he was kicked out of Portugal by Napoleon's armies. Within the vicinity of the former palace are several old churches, one of which we entered briefly—a lunch hour prayer service was in session. Like any other major metropolitan cities of its size, it was packed with cars, buses, taxis, and pedestrians. The contrast between the wide boulevards lined with huge skyscrapers and old, narrow side streets only fit for pedestrians was enchanting. We took one of the side streets with its fancy shops and ended up at one of Rio's oldest continuous restaurants, Colombo, which opened in 1894. It sits on two levels and to go to the second floor you take an antique elevator. On their first floor, there is a mouth-watering selection of pastries.

Allesandra said this is a popular tourist spot for afternoon tea. The buffet upstairs was sumptuous, but I restrained myself. Allesandra told me more about her work. Her father, who passed away two years ago, was a psychiatrist and director of a hospital; her uncle was the chief justice. She clearly comes from the elite. She matter-of-factly says she lives quite well in Leblon. She moved back home after her divorce a couple of years ago. Her brother is an economist who works as a financial analyst for a wealthy NGO. More elaborately, she talked about her research work on cultural consumption and some of her publications. She was clearly thrilled to have an attentive listener. I became even more convinced that she is very sharp and very well-read and passionate about scholarship. By the time we left, we had been in the restaurant for more than an hour and a half. Before we left, she convinced me to buy mementos from the gift shop for Cassandra.

I returned to the hotel around 4:00 p.m. and decided to walk around Copacabana for a while for both the exercise and to watch the crowds. Tonight the hotel restaurant was

more active than usual. I ate my dinner while staring at a soap opera on one of the local TV channels. Although I could not understand what they were saying, I could make out the action and it seemed as if it was about the usual intrigue and games middle-class families play. I eavesdropped on a group of young British tourists, a bunch of young men and women probably in their twenties who seemed anxious to party and get stoned. Back in the room, I read the *Newsweek* magazine on the world's most fascinating cities. None was African. Quite predictable.

July 5, 2006

This was a rather quiet day. Allesandra is trying to arrange for more meetings and possible sites to visit. It later became clear that she was unable to do so for today. I tried to get a hold of Solomon but I was also unable to, so I spent the day walking around Copacabana. I had lunch at a café—some rather tasteless, dry, grilled chicken. I briefly stopped by another open café along Atlantic Avenue facing the beach to watch the French-Portugal World Cup match, but left at half time to go back to the hotel because it was getting a little cool and I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt. I checked e-mail and found among several messages, one from Sally, my History Department head who had called earlier and left a message asking if she could call again tomorrow morning. I will take my time. Unless UIC screws up, I do not intend to stay in State College.

I bumped into several South Africans in the hotel, including a young medical student from Durban. Since coming to the hotel I have come across at least a dozen South Africans, mostly Indians and Coloreds, including several families, some on holiday and some attending conferences. It's quite revealing that these are the only Africans, self-identified, that I have encountered in the hotel. Again, it says a lot about the relative wealth of South Africa compared to other African countries.

After dinner, I watched a movie starring Bruce Willis that I had tried to watch once in State College but never managed to finish. In the relative boredom of a hotel evening, it was actually entertaining.

July 6, 2006

This was a very full, exciting day, which made up for yesterday. Allesandra and I had agreed that I would take a taxi and pick her up from her campus for a visit to the State University of Rio de Janeiro where we had a scheduled meeting at 12:30 p.m. I left the hotel at 11:15 a.m. and got to the campus at 11:30 a.m. She was unusually cheerful as she got into the taxi. I soon found out why. She had a date for tonight. This was her first date in one-and-a-half years, and she was so excited. She told me how she woke up early trying to get a proper dress since she wouldn't have time to go back home to change after our scheduled meetings. She was wearing a black dress and a black sweater that did her petite figure considerable justice. Her hair was fixed a little more than usual and she had her nails done, but she said she did not do make-up, foundation certainly, but not lipstick. Her date was with one of her colleagues who she had met in the corridors and talked to a few times before he asked her out yesterday. It was all so quick, she was almost blindsided

before she said yes. Normally, she thought men were more intimidated by her and she was cautious if invited on a date. This time she didn't have time to think. It was a torrent of excitement and I wondered what the taxi driver, an elderly black man from Salvador who had worked in Rio for 29 years, thought. Taxi drivers, like bartenders, are privy to some of the most intimate and even bizarre of conversations and confessions.

The Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ, the Rio de Janeiro State University) is located on the northern side of the city not far from the Maracana stadium and the carnival street that we visited on the city tour last Saturday. It overlooks favelas and this got Allesandra into a long ramble about the ugliness of the campus and her preference for South Rio. The campus is a collection of several high-rise boxes of austere concrete buildings. We arrived half an hour early and so we decided to stop by the coffee shop and walk around the campus before taking the elevator to the meeting.

Professor Magali da Silva Almeida received us warmly into her neatly arranged office, although she complained that it was disorderly. She asked if we wanted some coffee and proceeded to get it and return with one of her colleagues, Professor Maria Alice Rezende. Both women are in their early or mid-fifties. They look like sisters and behave like sisters, their body language, the seriousness easily broken by laughter and smiles, the inner rage and steely determination. Prof. Almeida is apparently the more easygoing of the two. She has been teaching for 30 years, she said. She is trained as a social worker, while Rezende trained as an anthropologist. She spoke comprehensible English while Almeida stuck to Portuguese. Almeida is the coordinator of the African and Afro-American Peoples Studies Debates Program (*Programa de Estudos e Debates Dos Povos Africanas e Afro-Americanos—PROAFRO*), while Rezende is the Associate Director. Almeida specializes in Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious studies and race relations, and Rezende specializes in race relations and education. They have both done extensive research on the quilombos.

They both pointed out that the situation of black academics has been improving, but great obstacles remain. UERJ was one of the first universities in the country, together with the Federal University in Bahia, to implement affirmative action and the dean of the university is black. However, white domination in the academy remains intact and opposition to affirmative action among some white academics is growing, black academics still have much fewer opportunities than whites. This is true even in research projects on race relations financed by organizations such as the Ford Foundation that has funded a lot of projects and centers. The opponents of affirmative action and quotas argue that either blacks don't need university education or that they institutionalize racial identities that are alien or disruptive and dangerous for Brazil. The implementation of affirmative action in higher education is uneven at the federal, state, and district municipal levels.

Rezende noted that she is the only one in her department who discusses race issues and her work tends to be ignored and is often not funded or accepted for congresses and publications. She has served on a committee organized by the Ministry of Education and composed of professors, government, and civil society, and has seen up close the limits of affirmative action policies. The challenges of training teachers to teach African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture are immense. There is need for comprehensive strategies at all levels.

They both noted that the changes that are taking place in government policies and race relations are a direct product of the black movement, which has succeeded in exploding the myth of racial democracy and in putting the racial question on the government's agenda. Growth of the black movement reflected, and contributed to, the growth of the

human rights and democracy movements in Brazil as well as the influence of the U.S. civil rights movement. Notions of black identity have been changing. Brazil has a complex system of racial classification. One of the government's official classifications divides the population into white, black, pardo, Asian/yellow, and indigenous/Indians. Popular classifications differentiate the population into even more categories based on phenotype, up to 136 classifications. The black movement stresses historical origin and self-identification rather than phenotype. Official classifications of black and pardo indicate that the two account for 45% of the country's population. The black movement claims Afro-descendants constitute more than 45%.

Almeida insisted that despite the changes in policies and rhetoric on race, racism hasn't changed. It has been metamorphosing. Blacks remain grossly underrepresented in all institutions and sectors of the economy among the professional middle classes, in business, industry, and politics. As in much of Latin America, Afro-Brazilians are concentrated among the poor and working poor. Not much is known about Africa, even about slavery or other diasporas. In this context, it is of fundamental importance to promote exchanges among Brazilian researchers and those from Africa and the other African diasporas.

As so often happens, the conversation became more animated the longer we talked. They suggested some key authors I needed to read and we agreed that they would send additional suggestions to Allesandra and we would continue our conversation in Salvador since both of them would be attending the Second Conference of Intellectuals from Africa and the Diaspora (CIAD II). Unfortunately, we had to stop talking about two hours later, for they were going to another meeting.

We went to lunch at the mall near Allesandra's university. She explained that many of the shops in the mall had closed because of lost business. There were so many shopping arcades in each of the neighborhoods, and restaurants had taken over, so you could find some of the best restaurants in the area in the mall. She took me to her favorite restaurant, which mostly serves salads called *Gula Gula*. The food was truly superb. I haven't had salad—salmon salad—that tasted so good in a while. Besides fretting about her date this evening, we discussed Brazilian politics, and Allesandra's observations were quite perceptive. She noted that Lula was likely to be re-elected because he appealed to the poor but did not threaten the interests of the elites—if he did so when he first came to power he would have been removed or destroyed by the elites. His support for the poor was more rhetorical than real. The institutionalized interests in Brazil are so powerful that nothing short of revolution can fundamentally transform the society.

After lunch, Allesandra took me to her campus, the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). Because of her sharp criticism of UERJ, I expected a lot more of UFRJ. Actually, it looked worse, except for the views of the mountains. The buildings are old and decrepit. Maintenance is obviously a problem—several of the buildings were being painted or repaired, probably for the first time in decades. Actually, this is only one campus, the university is scattered around the city. On Allesandra's campus were located the faculties of Management and Accountancy, Social Work, and Psychology. The faculty of Management and Accountancy, Allesandra's school, is located in a building that used to be a mental asylum. She kept saying how beautiful it was—its high walls, once-impressive doors, and peeled marble were badly in need of repair. The faculty seemed to share offices, each with their own cubicles in a large office, as I had seen in Barlovento. We ran into several of Allesandra's students who anxiously asked her whether she had finished grading their papers—so typical!

It turned out Professor Marcelo de Paula Paixão, the Associate Director of the Institute of Economics, who I had come to meet, had to attend a meeting and would only meet with me after that meeting after 6:00 p.m. In the meantime, we hung out in the courtyard watching the few students still around campus—for this was vacation time—and some faculty members walking around. Two of Allesandra's colleagues followed and stayed with us for a little while. One was Luciano, a chubby and pleasant lecturer in his mid-thirties. We had a most wonderful conversation about Brazilian and African issues. He is a self-professed Marxist scholar and activist. His master's dissertation was on the impact of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in Brazilian society. He examines the dichotomies between official discourses of tolerance and equality and the realities of marginalization in the labor market for blacks, women, gays, and the poor. When I expressed interest in seeing it, he asked Allesandra to send me a copy of his dissertation, which contains a lot of critical data on the subject.

After Luciano left, we went to the bookstore to try and buy some books that might be relevant for my project. Unfortunately, there were none. Allesandra thought we might have better luck at the bookstore on campus which caters to students of history, humanities, and the social sciences, or at a commercial bookstore, which we will look for tomorrow. After her date called to say he was coming to collect her, we agreed that I would wait for Prof. Paixão by myself. I am glad I did. It turned out to be perhaps the most informative meeting of this leg of the trip so far.

Marcelo offered a comprehensive overview of the growth of the black movement, the socioeconomic indicators of Afro-Brazilians compared to other Brazilians, and connections between Afro-Brazilians and other African diasporas. Until the 1960s, the main objective of the black movement was assimilation. This was an era when the ideology of racial democracy held sway in the country's political discourse and social imaginary. During the 1970s, there was transformation toward a multicultural perspective as the myth of racial democracy was exploded. The radicalization of the black movement was facilitated by several internal and external developments. Internally, there was the struggle against military dictatorship; the black movement was an integral and important part of the democratic movement. Externally, there was the influence of the civil rights movement in the United States, the Rastafarian and black cultural movements in the Caribbean, and the armed liberation struggles in Angola and Mozambique. A key figure in linking these struggles together was the Pan-African activist Abdias do Nascimento. More recently, a new movement has emerged that compliments, and in some instances supplants, the black movement and that is the landless movement.

This is a crucial historical movement for Brazil and Afro-Brazilians especially. The debate over race relations has never been as open and heated as it is now. It centers on affirmative action and quotas in universities. To date, 26 universities have adopted affirmative action. The socio-economic conditions of Afro-Brazilians have improved in some aspects and declined in others. The improvements can be seen for both blacks and whites in the indicators of child mortality, literacy rates, and education. Declines can be observed in the labor market, where the unemployment rates have increased thanks to the policies of neo-liberalism. Also, violence has increased. There are 40,000 murders a year. Black male youths are the main culprits of this violence and they suffer disproportionately from the lack of economic opportunities. The violence is linked to a rise in drug trafficking and consumption. He believes that what is happening to black male youth amounts to genocide.

He showed me a CD containing historical, social, and economic indicators library, as he called it. It is a comprehensive database, much like the World Bank's World Development

Report, the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa's detailed regional and country reports. The data provides detailed demographic, economic, social indicators for the Afro-Brazilian community *vis-a-vis* other communities. The sectors examined include access to education and health services, employment and wages, distribution of wealth and assets, land ownership, the spatial distribution of the Afro-Brazilian population across the country, and so on. The data is broken down by gender, age, class, occupation, and location. Tables and graphs are complimented by maps showing the spatial dynamics of the social-economic trends and indicators. A most impressive data set indeed. Afro-Brazilians, both black and pardo, make up at least 45% of the country's population, about 77 million, which makes Brazil, he pointed out, the second largest black country in the world after Nigeria.

He insisted that the economic and political studies of Afro-Brazilians are as crucial, perhaps even more so, as the historical, cultural, and sociological studies. In other words, while the study of Afro-Brazilians has been dominated by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, there is need for greater involvement by economists and political scientists. The marginalization and disempowerment of Afro-Brazilians are fundamentally economic and political questions. Every discipline must be involved in the study of Afro-Brazilians to reformulate the foundational discourses that ignore or silence race and racial realities. There is a tendency among white intellectuals to dismiss, disparage, and not to recognize black intellectual work. This attitude is more prevalent in the universities than in the NGO movement. Consequently, many black intellectuals tend to gravitate to the latter, which also provides opportunities for activist engagement with civil society. Black intellectuals and their views and work remain marginal and the struggle to change this will remain crucial and arduous in the years to come.

Most blacks in Brazil do not recognize themselves as black, but as *moreno*, *mulatto*, or *pardo*. It is pointless to try to condemn or criticize them, but it is important to understand how such a consciousness has developed and how it might be changed for their own empowerment. It is rooted, internally, in the imaginary of racial democracy and the construction of race in Brazil, and externally in ignorance and shame about Africa. The ideology of racial democracy was progressive in so far as it ended the policy of ignoring the African presence in the construction of Brazilian society and culture; indeed, the state was committed, after the abolition of slavery, to the policy of eliminating blacks physically either through genocidal wars and disease or through progressive whitening campaigns. Racial democracy was critical to the construction of a Brazilian national identity superseding the colonial, imperial, and neo-colonial identities of the previous centuries. It also looked progressive in a world appalled, during and after the Second World War, by fascist and Nazi ideologies in Europe and apartheid South Africa. Not surprisingly, it became an important instrument not only in domestic politics, but also for foreign policy. This ideology proved propitious to the development of relations with the new emerging nations of Africa. Brazil was among the first countries to recognize the independence of Angola and Mozambique. Thus, racial democracy, the notion that anti-black racism did not exist, proved beneficial for the Brazilian state and business with a rising Africa.

But besides the impact of the independence movements in Africa and state or corporate-mediated relations with Africa, Afro-Brazilians had little direct connections with Africa. Not only do most Afro-Brazilians not know which regions in Africa they came from beyond the broad geographical and cultural zones in West or Central Africa, the internal movements within Brazil over the centuries diluted the cultural and ethnic specificities the enslaved Africans may have brought with them. Also, the Africa that has

been portrayed in books and other documentary sources, the media, and films is so negative that many are often ashamed of Africa. The image of Africa is irredeemably bad: hunger, poverty, wars, disease—malaria, HIV/AIDS. It has penetrated deep into the consciousness of Brazilian society including, and especially, poor Afro-Brazilians with no access to alternative sources of information, encounters with Africans, or travel to Africa. The prevention of African immigration to Brazil after slavery barred new infusion and flow of ideas, information, and cultural practices from Africa. Those African elites who do come to Brazil on diplomatic or business missions often behave like transients and do not engage with Afro-Brazilians, especially the poor who are in the majority, in any meaningful way. The new education law requiring the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history will go some way to begin educating Brazilians, including Afro-Brazilians, the more positive aspects of Africa. The impact of the law on race relations remains unclear and it is perhaps too early to tell, but the black movement is fighting hard to see that the law is implemented. Views of Africa within the black movement, among the militants, tend to be confused. There is a tendency to valorize Africa's cultural heritage without critically and creatively addressing Africa's developmental challenges.

There is need, he believes fervently, for more broad-based engagements between Afro-Brazilians and Africans. He noted that he himself had only been to Africa once to attend the Durban Anti-Racism Conference in 2001, which was crucial to the black movement struggles in Brazil and helped usher in the current affirmative action policies. During the conference, he became increasingly aware of the different conceptions of Africa and Pan-Africanism among the Africans and diasporans—the latter have no investment or even understanding of Africa's ethnic and national identities and realities, while the former demonstrate little appreciation of the diasporan national histories, conditions and struggles. It occurred to me as he was talking that perhaps I could organize a conference on affirmative action in Brazil, the U.S., and South Africa. He has written an extensive paper, which he showed me, on affirmative action in Brazil, which noted how opponents of affirmative action, especially among whites, use similar arguments regardless of whether they are professed Marxists, liberals, or conservatives. I would love to read his paper—if only I understood Portuguese! Also crucial is for Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and the black movement to think strategically about the Americas as a whole, just as the movements of indigenous peoples are doing. It is imperative to assess the settlement heritage of the entire hemisphere, what the development of these settler societies and economies has entailed, collectively, for peoples of African descent. Thus, hemispheric Pan-Africanism must compliment trans-Atlantic Pan-Africanism.

I had a lot of questions to ask him, but time ran out. He had other urgent matters to attend to, including setting the final exam for one of his classes. But I was exhilarated by the two and a half hours we had spent together. I got back to the hotel about 9:00 p.m. We hugged heartily as I left and promised that we would continue our conversation in Salvador and in the future. He seemed quite pleased, and expressed surprise that he had talked in English for so long. I promised that I would introduce him to my friend and countryman Thandika Mkandawire for it appeared clear to me that both would benefit immensely from knowing each other and perhaps Thandika, who heads the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, could involve him in UNRISD projects. I immediately wrote Thandika an e-mail proposing a meeting between the two if he was coming to Salvador.

When I got to my room, I found two copies of the fax containing the counter-offer from Sally. It looked good, it was indeed generous, but I am still headed for UIC and Chicago.

July 7, 2006

This is my last full day in this enchanting city. Allesandra called about 9:30 a.m. to say she was trying to arrange a meeting with one of the three organizations whose names I had given her—the Centre for the Study of Marginalized Populations (*CEAP, Centro de Articulação População Marginalizadas*). The other two were IPEAFRO (Instituto de pesquisas e Estudos Afro-Brazileiro Afro-Brazilians Studies and Research Institute) whose director, Prof. Elisa Larkin Nascimento I had written before leaving State College but never got a response from, and who was currently too busy preparing for the Salvador conference, and CRIOLA, and Afro-Brazilian women's organization, where she got no answer. I got the names of the three organizations from Vera Lucia Benedito who studied for her PhD at Michigan State University, and whose name was given to me by Dianne Pinderhughes, my old colleague at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC).

Allesandra called half-an-hour later to indicate that she had set up a meeting with CEAP for the early afternoon. I had decided to take breakfast since it looked unlikely there would be a meeting in the morning and in case there was no time to take lunch. Allesandra came to pick me up about noon and we drove to the downtown offices of CEAP. The Center is located in Lapa, an old bohemian part of town, which had obviously seen better days, was now obviously rundown, and wore its poverty in buildings with peeling paint and dirty streets. The Center was located on the eighth floor of one of the few tall buildings in the area, which lies just behind Rio's imposing business district.

We were warmly received by Dr. Geraldo Rocha and his colleague whose name I didn't quite catch. Dr. Rocha did most of the talking. He is an animated activist scholar. Tall and slim with a small afro hair style, he talks with political passion. Besides his work with the Center, he teaches at two universities, a private one—Universidade UNIGRANRIO—and the Federal University of Fluminense.

He began by giving a long critique of the way black intellectuals are treated in the Brazilian academy, repeating much of what I had already heard from previous interviews: that black scholars are not taken seriously and have fewer opportunities; that there is a deeply entrenched consensus among white academics that black scholars are not producing knowledge, but pamphleteering, that they are not scientific enough; that racial issues are not significant for research; that when blacks want to study race, white scholars insist these issues should be studied from the dominant, white perspective; and that black students often have difficulty finding professors to supervise them. The white scholars who are most resistant to change are those in anthropology, history, and sociology, some of whom have sponsored the infamous manifesto against affirmative action, arguing that racial quotas are fomenting and institutionalizing racial conflicts. He gave the example of six black PhD students who have been prevented from studying racial issues.

Clearly, according to Professor Rocha, radical black intellectuals are discriminated against and opposed by the white academic establishment. The struggle against white intellectual hegemony is handicapped by limited resources and political support, notwith-

standing the rhetoric of the government. The black intellectuals have tried to overcome these obstacles by forming independent research institutions or centers and by lobbying black congressmen. The research institutions have few resources, and are often not able to sponsor their scholars to attend conferences. For example, he was not going to the CIAD II Conference in Salvador because of lack of funds. We talked of the Brazilian government's willingness to sponsor foreign scholars, like myself to attend CIAD II, but not local scholars. He observed a similar tendency with regard to student scholarships in which African students have sometimes been sponsored, but not Brazilian students.

Independent research centers and NGOs have played a crucial role in raising black consciousness in Brazilian society as a whole, and most recently in promoting affirmative action, which is intended to increase the black presence in the universities. The CEAP has been in the forefront of these struggles. It was created in 1989 by Professor Avenir who grew up in a youth detention center from the age of 2 to 18 when he left. He decided to form the Center to assist and protect black youths, both children and adolescents, from detention centers and foster homes which were often subject to violence and killings. The Center works in three areas: first, rights of children and adolescents, second, human rights, and third, black rights. Twenty-five to thirty people work in the Center. The work of the Center marked the beginning of the movement for the protection of vulnerable children and adolescents, which has influenced legislation and policies to protect children and adolescents. In fact, the work of the Center persuaded the government to establish the Human Rights Commission whose first secretary was the indefatigable activist Abdias do Nascimento. Professor Avenir, director of the Center, is the Executive Secretary of the Durban + 5 Conference for the Americas to be held at the end of July in Brazil to examine the extent to which the objectives of the 2001 Durban Anti-Racism Conference have been and are being implemented. The record for Brazil is a mixed one: some of the affirmative action policies agreed to in Durban are being implemented for various marginalized populations, while others are not. The Center now caters to a wide range of marginalized groups who come and seek the Center's support and help. The Center's work has extended to such issues as child labor and the trafficking of women. Its work was recently recognized when it won a major national prize.

One of its key areas is education. It has produced a 40-minute long documentary film on the history of black resistance in Brazil, which depicts the economic, social, and cultural struggles of Afro-Brazilians, and features historians, sociologists, economists, and even medical and other scientists. The Center works closely with schools and seeks to help prepare black students to enter and finish college. Currently 3–5% of blacks enter university and only 2% finish—this, in a country where at least 45% of the population is black. The Center has produced six textbooks, with a seventh in progress, for use in schools: (1) on the history of Africa (2) on why it is important to study Africa, (3) on affirmative action policy and its implementation in Brazil, (4) on the significance of slavery reparations, (5) on literature and poetry, (6) on Afro-Brazilian religions, and (7) on democratization in Brazil. Also, the Center has been actively involved in capacity building for schools through its training programs for teachers to enable them to teach African and Afro-Brazilian history. While the number of teachers and students eager to learn these fields is high, the provision of state resources, whether by the federal or state governments, has been rather meager. The absence of a significant black presence and pressure in key decision-making ministries and agencies has hampered progress. The Center and the black movement as a whole are trying to mobilize political pressure on the federal government, as seen recently with the counter-petition they presented in Brasília against the petition of the anti-affirmative action campaigners.

He lamented that while personal linkages between some Afro-Brazilian researchers like himself and Avenir exist with Africa—both have been to either Mozambique or Angola—institutional linkages do not. The language barrier entails that linkages are largely maintained with the Lusophone African countries. His Center would be interested in working closely with African academic associations and research networks, including the Association of African Historians and CODESRIA, which I mentioned to him. As we were talking about this, I made notes to myself to contact Teresa da Cruz e Silva, CODESRIA's current president who is both a historian and a Mozambican, and perhaps Bethwell Alan Ogot and Toyin Falola to see what ways we might contribute to the current efforts to put African history into Brazilian classrooms, the first time that such an effort is being mounted systematically.

As we were coming to the end of our discussion, Avenir briefly popped in. A short man wearing a white safari suit and a white Muslim hat, he expressed disappointment that we could not communicate more directly and fully since he spoke little English and I spoke no Portuguese. I later learned from Allesandra that he is involved in a political campaign and is likely to be a congressman after the national elections in December. Before we left, Dr. Rocha invited me to come back at 4:30 p.m. to participate in a TV interview that he was doing. I agreed.

Given the need to come back to CEAP, we decided to postpone the bookstore tour Allesandra and I had originally scheduled and decided to return to the hotel to have a late lunch and sort out her payment. The lunch—a buffet—was good, after which we worked out details of Allesandra's payment, in which she would be paid for the hours she had already worked and those she would continue to work to summarize the books in Portuguese we would be purchasing and other documents she came across. Unfortunately, I was unable to change the traveler's checks at the HSBC bank near the hotel, or the Cambio across the road that I was directed to by a friendly clerk in the bank. When I returned to the restaurant where I had left Allesandra (she was afraid of walking the streets!), I decided I would use my debit card at the mall where the bookstore was located.

We arrived at the CEAP offices as the TV crew was coming in. They first interviewed Rocha, then I was called in. The interviewer as well as the cameraman and the third person with them were all black and seemed quite fascinated by the fact that I was from the continent. The interviewer told Allesandra the questions he would be asking me and said I could speak in English and they would have my remarks later translated for the broadcast. He asked me about the importance of CIAD II Conference in Salvador for Brazil and my views of Brazil's affirmative action policies and debates. I stressed the importance of both for Brazil, first, that it was crucial for Africa and Brazil to get a better understanding of each other's historic ties that could be used to forge closer and more productive ties for the present and the future, and second, that affirmative action was fundamental to redressing historic injustices against Afro-Brazilians and for the country to realize its full potential for development, democracy, human rights, and peace. The interview will be broadcast on the education channel, TVE, at 10:00 p.m. tonight. Allesandra said she would get one of her friends to tape it in case I couldn't watch it at the hotel.

From CEAP we took a taxi to the bookstore at the mall. Every opportunity Allesandra had throughout the day she talked about her date last night and how wonderful Luigi, or so I think that's what she called him, is. He called her as we were approaching the mall and she broke into an endearing smile of a woman who has discovered love. When she

finished talking to him she turned to me with a smile of satisfaction and repeated again how wonderful, how sensitive he was, how well their date had gone. He had taken her to a cozy bistro before they went to see a play, which only confirmed how sensitive he was, for the play was about relationships, about a woman searching for love, for a man to marry. He was either naïve or a player, Allesandra said of Luigi, because he was not afraid to talk of his emotions, to reveal his vulnerabilities, to confide in her about his failed marriage. She concluded that he was naïve because he did not seem like the player type. He was different from all the men she had met before who were from the northern part of Rio and were either her age or younger; Luigi was from the southern suburbs, and was 41. He was obviously a serious guy who had taken his first marriage very seriously and only now, a year and a half later, did he finally accept that it was over. And he even liked to wear a tie to school and was formal with his students! It was fun and funny listening to her.

The mall, like most malls in large cities, was packed with customers and the youth seeking companionship and a little trouble. Allesandra tried to get me to do some shopping for Cassandra, but I reminded her we had come for the bookstore. She grudgingly agreed that we focus on the bookstore but insisted that next time I came to Rio I should bring Cassandra with me and the four of us would go out together. She had decided Luigi was a keeper!

As Allesandra searched the shelves for the relevant books for my project, I sat in the bookstore café checking e-mail and reading the usual online papers I tend to read on a regular basis. She took her work very seriously, gone was the coquettish woman in love I saw only a few moments ago. More than an hour later, she had selected two sets of multi-volume works and several single-authored or single-volume edited books. She meticulously went through the table of contents of each, commending the authors, all of whom are clearly major figures in Brazilian history and studies. After I paid for the books, we hugged and exchanged heartfelt words of appreciation for the time we had spent together. It has been one of the most wonderful research experiences she has ever had, for she had learned a lot about her own country. I commended her for her diligence, intelligence, and good-natured spirit. For good measure, I boasted I had brought her good luck with Luigi and she reminded me about the four of us going out on a date in Rio next time I came with Cassandra.

Back at the hotel I went to eat at the restaurant and told the waiter that this was my last night at the hotel. They all bade me farewell. When I mentioned that I was headed for Salvador, one of the waiters mentioned that the woman sitting at the bar watching a soap on TV was from Salvador. I was introduced to her, but we couldn't really say anything to each other for neither of us spoke the other's language. She wore long locks, probably the first I had seen since coming to Rio. In the room, I packed my stuff and set the clock for a 7:00 a.m. wake-up call.

July 8, 2006

I woke up half an hour before the alarm was supposed to go off. I always find it difficult to sleep properly if I know I am traveling early the next morning. I was at the reception to pay my bill a little after 7:00 a.m. I had debated whether to have breakfast. The receptionist said it would take a while to print the bill and said it would be ready after I took breakfast. That turned out to be the right decision for I spent many hours waiting for my flight at the airport. The bill only contained my expenditures at the hotel, excluding accommodation,

which had already been charged the moment I booked with Travelocity. The receptionist said I would need to contact Travelocity to get that portion of the receipt.

Before I got into the taxi taking me to the airport, the woman with the locks from last night rushed to the taxi and handed me a paper with her hotel address in Salvador and asked for mine. The trip to the airport was cheaper by more than R\$25. As the receptionist said, taxis at the airport charge higher for incoming visitors because you are more captive. The morning was foggy so I couldn't see much. The road looked a lot more familiar, as I had traveled it several times; the south side looked more drab, the favelas more unpleasant than I remembered them looking on the way from the airport. The airport itself was a lot easier to navigate because I was going on a domestic flight—no customs. That turned out to be the best part of the trip, for when I got to the check-in counter I was asked whether I had called to confirm my ticket. I immediately suspected that something was wrong. Sure enough, the ticket attendant told me with the sweetest of smiles that the flight had been cancelled, but she would try to get me on another one, for my next scheduled flight on Varig was at 3:30 p.m., and this was only 8:00 a.m.! When she returned without the smile, I knew she had not succeeded and she said I could be on standby for other airlines, but advised it would be best to wait for Varig's 3:30 p.m. flight. We joked about Varig's troubles, which I had read about in the papers. She confirmed, with some concern, that they didn't know how matters would turn out.

Hardly had I left the counter than I saw the woman with the locks from the hotel pulling her bag toward the counter for another airline. She spotted me and waved. I made gestures that my flight was delayed and she shook her head. The domestic waiting lounge was large, airy, with lots of windows, but largely empty for much of the day except for brief moments when flights were departing or arriving. It was most unlike American airports, which are often crowded and dingy. Before long, I saw the woman with the locks again. She walked towards me and I pulled out my pocket-size Brazilian Portuguese phrase book and greeted her. I searched for words "flight delayed" and when I couldn't find them, I just showed her my flight coupon. She said something which must have meant, "I am sorry for you" from the expression on her face. Her flight departed at 10:15 as originally scheduled. I sauntered to my departure gate. There was only one woman sleeping on the chair. I decided to go to the bookstore. The few English language magazines were either those that I had already read—*Newsweek*, *The Economist*—or I wasn't interested in. I finally settled for *Fortune*, a special issue on investment for retirement. Cassandra jokes that this has become my pet preoccupation since I turned 50 last year. I read the magazine with unusual concentration to forget the long hours of waiting.

The sleeping woman finally sat up and put on her radio which was playing an assortment of American and what sounded like Brazilian pop music. She asked me to look after her things when she went to the bathroom. I noticed she was pregnant, which she confirmed. She was going home to Salvador for the birth of the child in September. She lived in Spain, where she had been for four years. She loved Spain, in fact, she liked Europe, but she wanted her baby born in her home town of Salvador. She was black. Tall, slim, and friendly; she spoke English quite well and she sounded relieved to have someone to talk to. For the next few hours we would take turns looking after each other's bags when the other person went to the bathroom, she went more frequently than I. It was during one of her bathroom trips that she read on the monitor the flight had been delayed to 4:00 p.m.

Fortunately, this turned out to be the last change. We left Rio finally at the latest scheduled time. The plane was full and I spent the next hour and three quarters napping

or pouring through *Fortune* magazine and when I couldn't take the investment advice anymore I pulled out an issue of *The Economist* that I had not finished reading.

We arrived in Salvador just before 6:00 p.m. All my luggage made it and I booked a taxi before leaving the arrival hall; I expected to pay more than I would probably pay on my return to the airport. The journey from the airport took over half an hour. I was too tired, and a little annoyed, for spending the whole day at the airport to be too interested in looking around and trying to form impressions. Besides, it was already dark. I recall seeing no lights flickering in the hills, so I suspected there were no mountains around. The crowds at bus stops and walking the streets were predominantly and unmistakably black and lively, which cheered me somewhat. But then I remembered the caution from Professor Paixão not to exaggerate the Africanness of Salvador, for Afro-Brazilians are spread all over the country, although their relative concentrations vary, and Afro-Brazilians, like all diaspora populations, have invented and re-invented themselves and their cultures over the last few centuries.

The hotel looked impressively large as we approached it in the silhouette of the night. The entrance and the reception were quite remarkable. But the room I was given was a letdown. It looked large and well-furnished with several paintings by local artists hanging elegantly on the walls, and the views of Salvador's night skyline from the window were stunning. When I opened the door to the small balcony, I could hear the enchanting, mighty roar of the ocean. But when I tried to take a shower the water was an ugly, brown liquid and the drain did not seem to work. They kindly agreed to transfer me to the next room after a plumber failed to fix the problem, only to find the new room smelling like a stale chimney. Finally, they gave me a room on a non-smoking floor and I happily took my shower, after which I went to the restaurant for a delightful dinner. The waiters were quite anxious to please, even more so when they found out I was from Africa and this was my first visit to Salvador. This is one of the few places, together with Venezuela, where being from Africa has been a badge of honorable curiosity.

Cassandra called after she returned home and got my message. She had shocking news about Robyn and Karim that helped explain his sudden death. She had gone to Karim's memorial at Robyn's house, which she said was weird enough in being held at the house instead of a more public venue, and in the scorching heat in the yard, for that matter. Cassandra learned that Robyn had kicked Karim out of the house and had the locks changed. As it was, the locksmith was at the memorial. That is the reason Karim went to a hotel where he died. Apparently, Robyn found out he had married a second wife in Senegal! So much for the front of a happy couple—testimony to the mysteries and secrets buried deep in marriages. Apparently, the Senegalese community in State College is mad with Robyn. This is a terrible tragedy for all concerned. I particularly feel sorry for the innocent baby who will grow up without a father and will discover the circumstances of his death many years from now.

July 9, 2006

I went to have breakfast, more out of curiosity to see who was there that I might recognize. There was no one. The breakfast was the usual assortment except for a Salvadoran dish of cassava flour pancake-type wrapped with ham and a sweet fruit—it tasted quite

delicious. I was encouraged to try it by one of the waiters who seemed anxious for me to sample the culinary specialties of Salvador.

After breakfast, I went to wait for Taynar, my contact in Salvador, in the lobby. We had agreed on the phone last night that she would come at 11:00 a.m. together with the research assistant/translator, Veronica. Actually, I talked more with Taynar's husband, who has a better command of English, as Taynar gave him instructions in the background. To my great surprise, just before 11:00 a.m. I saw the woman in the locks coming through the entrance to the hotel. She was looking for me. I later discovered that she had called my room at the time I was having breakfast and a friend of hers had left a message in English saying Cristina, that's her name, would be coming to take me to the beach with her friends. As I did not have my Brazilian Portuguese phrasebook at the time, all we did was give and exchange greetings.

A few minutes later Taynar walked in—I assumed it was her for she immediately walked in the direction I was sitting with a broad smile and outstretched arms ready for a hug. They hug and kiss each other on the cheeks a lot here, I said to myself. She was clearly happy to meet me; she probably had seen my face on the net. Her English was good enough to muster enough greetings. She asked Cristina whether she was Veronica. When Cristina shook her head, Taynar got her cell phone out and excused herself. She came back and said Veronica was on the way and apologized for her delay. She went to wait for her outside. Cristina and I sat there in awkward silence unable to communicate.

To my relief, it did not take long before Taynar returned with a smiling Veronica. I looked at Veronica closely—was this a repeat of Rio? She looked white, or was she a light-skinned sister, a mulatto? The questions racing in my mind were soon overtaken by the relief that she spoke fluent English, in fact much more fluently than Allesandra in Rio. Indeed, she spoke with an American accent, actually a New York accent. I later learnt she had spent time in New York. Medium height, with her hair tied into a bun on her head, she was dressed in casual slacks. For the next half hour or so, I briefed her about my project, and we discussed logistics. Taynar would be responsible for arranging all the visits and meetings while Veronica would actually accompany me.

It seemed like a good arrangement, for Taynar is obviously well connected in the Salvador Afro-Brazilian intellectual community. She noted that I was visiting at a particularly opportune moment because of the CIAD II Conference—most of the important Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and activists would be attending and she would try to arrange for interviews with some of them. Before they left, both Veronica and Taynar gave me the ritual hug. Taynar is very tall—over six feet, wears an afro with a head-band—and I felt like a midget as she stooped to hug me. We all seemed relieved to have met at last and deduced that we could get along.

The awkwardness with Cristina returned. I gestured I was going to bring the phrasebook and when she understood she smiled and nodded in agreement. It turned out that she wanted to take me to the beach with her friends if I had nothing else to do. I quickly agreed, curious and excited at the prospect of seeing a side of Salvador that I would probably not see otherwise. We walked down the slope—the hotel sits on elevated ground—past the gate and into the streets below. It was difficult to walk and check for phrases in the book so we didn't talk and I felt a little silly. We boarded a bus and while sitting she explained, through the invaluable phrasebook, that she would pass through her hotel and get her swimming suit and her friends would meet us at the beach below the hotel. I discovered that while she was born in Salvador and her parents still live here,

she lives in another city. She had come to Salvador for a business meeting. She worked with Petrobras, the giant Brazilian oil company, as an administrator. She has worked with the company for twenty-five years. The conference would start tomorrow until the weekend when she would be returning home. She was happy to be back in Salvador, to enjoy its great beaches—Sundays were for beaches and beer!

She complained that her hotel was not all that good; in fact, that Salvador did not have many good hotels. I waited for her in the reception and then we walked to the beach down the road. The place was already packed with people, largely with youngish men and women, mostly under 40, all scantily clad in their swimwear; men showing off their finely chiseled bodies, and women with exquisitely curved bodies, although we spotted a few potbellies and large behinds. It was a beautiful celebration of the human form, of the black and brown body, for there were few whites in the crowds. Some were swimming, playing ball, riding the waves or water skiing, and many more were just sitting drinking beer and eating fish soup, walking holding hands, or sampling the sights. Few were basking in the open sun. The place was a sea of umbrellas and tables and chairs, with kiosks selling beer and other drinks and light foods lined behind, vendors plying their handmade jewelry, pirated music CDs, or roasted peanuts and cashew nuts, as pulsating rhythmic music blared in the air. It was so intoxicatingly festive.

As we waited for her friends to come, I found out more about Cristina. Her mother was 79 and her father 76, like my father. She was the third in a family of nine—five women and four men. The oldest was 55. She has three children; her oldest was 20, a girl studying economics. Cristina was 46 and divorced. She loved Africa, she said, and hoped to visit the continent one day. She thought the African football players from Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire were beautiful men; she was torn during the Ghana-Brazil match, she had to support Brazil of course, but she liked the Ghanaians.

Cristina's friends arrived about twenty minutes or so later. There were three women; one was a colleague of Cristina's at Petrobras. She was a biologist; she spoke rudimentary English, but thought her command of the language was much better than it actually was. She sat next to me while making her claims to English fluency and turned out to be hilariously funny. As the day wore on, the funnier she became (assisted by an ample supply of beer). A plump, tall woman with short hair, she said they were all African descendants, even if she might look mulatto. She liked the South African singers Miriam Makeba and Lucky Dube. The other two women were sisters, but the only resemblance among them, if you looked hard, was the shape of their noses. One was dark and could have been from any town or village in Malawi; and the younger one was a very light-skinned mulatta. It turned out the younger sister was the partner of the biologist, who told me she was gay and, as she got more intoxicated in the course of the day, would gently stroke her lover's face, looking at me mischievously and say, isn't she beautiful, in her throaty voice.

From the first beach, we drove to another beach which was even more crowded and which was apparently the favorite for gays. I saw young men holding hands and hugging, and young women too; others were heterosexual couples. The three women except the biologist's lover downed one beer after another, while I and the young woman drank water. At the first beach I had tried coconut, but the water tasted sour. We sat there for hours; the beer flowed, supplemented by fish soup, salad, and delicious roasted fish. At one time, I walked alone along the beach watching the crowds on one side and the white waves of the brilliant blue water on the other. It was all so enchanting. In fact, the beach

stretched for miles, perhaps fifteen to twenty miles, and all of it was occupied by swimmers and kiosks and some of the most gorgeous female bodies I had ever seen, sights that make one marvel and relish black beauty in all its mesmerizing tones and shades.

From this beach spot, we left for another, several miles away, near the light house, to a kiosk owned by an old friend of the biologist where more beer and food flowed. The owner of the kiosk was a black man in his sixties, and once he learned I was an African he gave me and the four other women copies of a CD of Bahian music. It was beginning to get dark and the beach was not as crowded as at the other spots we had been or seen on the way. The waves were broken by a series of rocks that jutted from the water a few feet from the beach. I sat on one of them, watching the lights of the city beginning to flicker in the distance and the endless calm sea and thought of the arduous journey our people had traveled from the African coast of this vast ocean to this coast, their bodies chained together, their minds severed from a familiar past, awaiting an uncertain future, a harrowing life of labor to build these stolen lands and the equally demanding task of recreating and reinventing their culture and social selves. Their descendants were all those crowds reveling in the warm sands of the Salvador coast.

It was when we drove back that I realized how far we had traveled along the coast. At one square near the last stop, we passed a large ecstatic crowd eating, drinking, and walking around in their bikinis. I was told this was how people here spent their Sundays: one large party, a mini carnival. The biologist, now a little inebriated, drove with gusto, overtaking cars, and singing to the music playing from the CD her friend at the kiosk had given us. Her young lover sat contentedly beside her. When we got back to my hotel, the biologist, her name is Soraha as I recalled when she gave me her number, gave me a tight hug saying how happy she was to have met me. Cristina gave me a warm hug and, through Soraha, said she wished me a wonderful stay in Salvador. The young lover remained in the car and gave me a wide smile exposing her braces. It was around 8:00 p.m. and I felt grateful for the outing. It was so generous of Cristina and her friends.

I decided to order room service instead of going to the restaurant. It was a lovely dish of shrimp stew served with coconut milk. For the rest of the evening I read.

July 10, 2006

The day started with a bang. Veronica called last night to say that we would start the day at 8:30 a.m. for our first appointment at 9:00 a.m. Just before 8:00 this morning, she called to ask if we could meet by the front gate of the hotel in a taxi for her to avoid walking up the hill. I found an English-speaking driver and we were at the gate by 8:30 a.m. When I started fretting that Veronica wasn't yet there, the driver joked about Brazilian time that nobody really turns up on time. Veronica repeated the same point when she finally turned up about 10 minutes later, although she did apologize and indicated she had been held up in traffic.

Our first appointment was at the Centro de Estudos dos Povos Afro-Índio-Americanos (CEPAIA, Center for Afro-Indigenous Studies in the Americas) to meet with the Director, Vilson Caetano de Souza Jr. During the half-hour drive to the Center, I found out more about Veronica. Slim and of average height and easily given to smiling and laughter, she is from Venezuela. Or rather, she was born in Venezuela, which her parents left when she

was eight. She grew up in the Bronx in New York and went to New York University (NYU) where she majored in cultural studies. She enrolled for graduate studies in education at Brown University, although I wasn't clear whether she actually finished. She later indicated that she had gone to Brown to please her parents who did not seem to understand why she would want to leave the U.S. for Brazil. She lived with her partner, a French man with Malagasy origins. She had been to Africa once, to South Africa for the 2001 Anti-Racism Conference and to Mozambique.

She works part-time at the Biko Institute teaching English to underprivileged black kids. Her partner is a karate instructor. In the course of the day I found out they had left New York for a simpler, more meaningful life. She is quite strong in her anti-U.S. and anti-capitalist views and her support for the poor and oppressed. She is passionate without being sanctimonious; she seems acutely aware of the dynamics and damaging effects of class and racial privileges. Throughout the day she gave me a shrewd synopsis of the class and racial disparities in Salvador, noting the division of the city between the old and the new areas, the rich areas along the coastline and the poor areas with favelas that looked much like those in Rio and Caracas, located on high grounds, piled on top of each other.

CEPAIA is located in the historic part of Salvador, in Pelourinho, in a large building which houses several organizations including, as I later found out, the Biko Institute. We were warmly received by the secretary who asked if we wanted something to drink. A glass of water and a small cup of coffee were brought to us. We sat around the table in the secretary's office, which was rather cramped. The director, Vilson, soon joined us and cheerfully greeted us in heavily accented English. He is relatively young, probably in his early- to mid-thirties. He was wearing a light print shirt, the sleeves were unbuttoned, and he had two earrings. Veronica explained my project and the purpose of my visit. He seemed eager to talk.

Taynar had prepared a brief bio on him. He is an anthropologist who works on the Afro-Brazilian population. He is the author of two books, *Nago: The Nation of Ancient Travelers*, published in 2005, and *Orixas: Saints and Holidays*, published in 2003. This year he was awarded the Erico Vannucci Mendes Prize. After listening to him, I was in no doubt that he is a brilliant scholar and researcher.

Our discussion focused on the development and importance of Afro-Brazilian religion. He stressed that religion constituted an important basis, a key instrument, through which Afro-Brazilians constructed their identity. Afro-Brazilian religion was constructed out of three complex traditions: first, through the reconstruction of the African heritage. The matrix of Afro-Brazilian religion was a product of the conversations, dialogues, discussions, exchanges and interactions of the various African cultures, ethnicities, languages and religions that were brought to Brazil. The construction of the new African religious practices, values, and symbols had to contend with the second religious tradition, namely Catholicism.

There were some similarities between the reconstructed, invented African religions and Catholicism, although the latter sought to dominate, to overwhelm the former. The incorporation of Catholic practices, beliefs and symbols was undoubtedly facilitated by the inherent propensities of African thought, its capacity to add new and other experiences into its corpus of ideas and practices rather than to relegate them to binaries and oppositions, as is the tendency in European thought. The third tradition was the indigenous ways of being, communicating, commemorating and consecrating the supernatural, which the emerging African religious matrix incorporated.

As Afro-Brazilian religions developed, the presence of identifiably non-African symbols raised questions about purity, about authenticity, and the notion developed that the community with the least Catholic symbols was the closest to Africa, to authentic African religious experience. Such views are no longer prevalent, as it has come to be understood and accepted that the African religious matrix is a complex construction of diverse religious traditions. It has also come to be understood that the Africa that Afro-Brazilians have in their imagination is a myth, a construction, but nonetheless real for them in so far as it is their construction.

Religion has been fundamental to the construction of Afro-Brazilian identity because it is through religion that the valorization of African humanity, of the slaves' worthiness as human beings, that the institution of slavery tried to strip away from them, was pronounced and practiced. All the key values that were stolen from them by slavery—value of the family, respect for women, and relationships with death—were maintained and reproduced through religion. Women were very important in Afro-Brazilian religion and many studies have demonstrated the decisive role women played in Candomblé and Santería. Of course, not every black person or anybody who identifies him or herself as Afro-Brazilian necessarily practices or is active in Afro-Brazilian religion, but no one can ignore how it has profoundly affected the development of Afro-Brazilian culture. Thus, while a distinction can be made between those who proclaim blackness but ignore the religious matrix, the latter cannot be ignored in the construction and valorization of blackness.

In this sense, the religious matrix was important as a source of collective black identity, in the development of the black movement. The rise of Marxism within the movement challenged the importance of culture and religion. This apparent threat—the dichotomy between culture and politics—is being overcome as the black movement develops and it becomes obvious that it has to address, simultaneously, the political, socio-economic and cultural position and struggles of Afro-Brazilians. In particular, the important role played by women in Afro-Brazilian religion as leaders, and in Afro-Brazilian history and culture—as founders of quilombos, traders, etc.—reinforces the progressive potential of the black cultural movement; it shows that the struggles for women's emancipation and empowerment did not start in the 1970s, but has a much older history rooted in the Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural traditions.

I asked Vilson about linkages between the African people and Afro-Brazilian religions. He noted that exchanges date back to the days of slavery and the slave trade when African merchants responded to the need for religious objects and symbols by marketing them in Brazil. Also, religious leaders and initiates spent and continue to spend time in Africa. In short, there has been a continuous history of exchanging products, knowledge, experiences, legends, chants, symbols, and beliefs. Unfortunately, time did not allow him to elaborate on some of these points as I would have liked. He apologized that he had another meeting to attend. He gave me a firm handshake and the customary hug and pat on the back as he bade me farewell. He agreed that I could drop by again for further discussion and turned to Veronica and told her about the bookstore where we could find copies of his books.

As we left the building we walked through a hall in which a meeting was being held, which Veronica suspected was related to the CIAD II Conference. It would have been nice for us to listen for a while, but we agreed it would be rude for her to try and translate as the speakers were talking. That is when the idea of buying a tape recorder was raised.

The building hosting CEPA stands on top of an incline facing a very old church on one side and on the other, run-down houses whose rotten roofs I could see from one of

the rooms upstairs when we returned later in the day. We walked down the stone covered courtyard and narrow road, and up again on another incline on our way to the historic center of Salvador. Lining the road and courtyards were two to three story houses, as well as tourist shops sporting the usual tourist wares of T-shirts, brightly colored clothes, cheap jewelry, and trinkets. It all looked so clean, dressed for an occasion. Veronica mentioned that this part of the historic center was being renovated, gentrified; many poor people had lost their homes in the process. As we got closer to the offices of our next meeting, she pointed to a part that had yet to be converted. Sure enough, it looked run down; the buildings had long forgotten the color of their original paint and now sported cracks.

Our next stop was at the offices of IPAC (*Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico e Cultural do Estado Bahia*) to meet with the Director General, Professor Julio Braga, the former director of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Orientais (CEAO, Centre for Afro-Oriental Studies) which has played a central role in fostering linkages with Africa. He served as director of CEAO for four years. CEAO was created in 1963. Among its programs, it promotes student exchanges with Africa. He lived for eight years in Senegal, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, and Nigeria, from 1967–75.

IPAC is a government institution charged with the restoration and protection of cultural patrimony or heritage. It was formed in the 1970s and has undergone several stages. Much of its work now has less to do with restoration and more with maintenance of the cultural heritage. A law passed in December 2003 gave IPAC responsibility for the non-material aspects of cultural heritage. IPAC originally grew out of work done by UNESCO in the late 1960s.

I asked him, based on his extensive African experience, to comment on Brazil-Africa relations. He noted that it is important to keep in mind the importance of Africa in the development of Brazil. The role of slavery cannot be overemphasized. As a result of this history, Brazil has to have a commitment to Africa. The building of strong diplomatic relations between Brazil and Africa is not and cannot be based solely on economic considerations. The Afro-Brazilian nationalist movement is increasingly important in the development of these relations and is particularly pronounced in the intellectual realm. However, many Afro-Brazilians tend to be focused on the African past, and have little knowledge of contemporary African realities. In this regard, CIAD II is important for bringing and spreading the knowledge of Africa to Brazilians and, to the Afro-Brazilian community in particular, knowledge about African developments, conditions, challenges, and struggles.

I asked him to comment on how he was perceived and treated while he lived on the continent. He noted the close relationship between Bahia and Benin, the return of Brazilian slaves and freedmen to Benin where they established a new cultural presence imported from Brazil. There are neighborhoods with Brazilian names and evidence abounds of Brazilian influence in architecture and other forms of material and non-material culture. Perhaps because of this, he was treated as a returning brother from Brazil.

He believes relations between Brazil and Africa can be improved. The reality is that the nostalgia for Africa, the subject of his CIAD II Conference presentation, remains powerful. But it needs to be complimented by more realistic understanding of African conditions. There is a need for more actual exchanges by different groups and at different levels between Africa and Brazil. The latter is a major middle power that has the potential to assist Africa. Unfortunately, he was pressed for time and so we couldn't pursue the dis-

cussion further. He gave me several brochures and a book detailing the work of IPAC. I promised I would attend his presentation and he expressed interest in attending mine.

It was lunch time by the time we left the IPAC offices. We decided to walk around and look for a tape recorder. The streets were crowded and it all felt like I was in parts of the old town in Mombasa, while other parts felt like I was walking in certain quarters of Nairobi or Blantyre. The fact that most of the people and pedestrians were black added to the uncanny familiarity. We stopped in a few shops to look for the tape recorder, including a couple of electronic and music shops, but couldn't find one. Veronica suggested that we go to the mall, which looked quite packed for a Monday. While standing in the queue to pay for the notebooks I got in one of the shops, a man standing behind me took great interest in my accent. He asked where I was from and when I said Malawi, he asked, Africa? When I confirmed it he started saying how much he liked Africa, how much he would love to visit it. He was white, or so he looked. We finally found a shop that stocked tape recorders on the third floor, but they cost more than the money I had on me, so we decided to come back after lunch.

Veronica seemed a little concerned about finding a restaurant that would appeal to both my culinary and class tastes. She looked visibly relieved when I said it didn't matter as long as the place served good local food, preferably fish. We ended up at a simple joint. There were no seats outside, so we were directed inside to the second floor where we were seated next to three women in their work uniforms who were so deep in conversation that they paid us no mind. The food we ordered—fish, beans, and rice with a separate plate of plantains—was quite good and cheap. My only complaint was that they did not have juice or bottled water, so I had to settle for a can of orange soda. I try to avoid soda as much as possible.

After lunch, we took the bus. Veronica seemed quite concerned about costs. I welcomed her suggestion to take the bus. We passed through the hotel where I had originally planned to stay, Hotel Bahia do Sol, before the CIAD II Conference organizers informed me they had booked me at the Pestana and would pay for my stay there for the duration of the conference. As we left the historic center, the buildings looked bigger and newer, although the high and hilly areas were covered by favelas. Later we drove past the Federal University of Bahia, at which point Veronica went into a long discourse about discrimination against the poor and black students at the university. The university is free but it costs a lot for the students to sit and pass the entrance exams. Also, the campuses of the university are spread throughout the city so that for poor students it is quite a strain trying to take courses on the different campuses. In effect, therefore, the poor are often effectively excluded and the rich subsidized.

Before we got to the Pestana Hotel we stopped by an Internet café, which Veronica said was cheaper than the hotel rates. We wanted to check for the registration at the CIAD II Conference since I had not filled in the online registration form—the last time I checked last Wednesday, the English version of the registration was not yet up. After several failed attempts to register, we decided to walk to the hotel and try the Internet system there. Fortunately, before we could do so we met one of the conference organizers, a foreign ministry official, who told us that the online registration system had been closed but thought I would have been automatically registered since I had been invited to make a presentation. But he would check just in case and he gave me his number where I could contact him later.

We took a taxi back to the old town. The offices of the Steve Biko Cultural Institute are located in the same building where CEPAI has its offices. We sat by the entrance for about half an hour to catch our breath and wait for one of the directors. Students came

in and out of the building and we discussed the challenges of teaching spoiled, middle-class and rich university kids in the U.S. and poor high school kids at the Institute. There were many similarities—the lack of motivation, the disinterest in reading and hard work. The only difference is that Veronica's students do not whine about their grades as mine always do.

We met the co-directors Lazaro Cunha and Silvio Humberto Cunha. They are brothers. They are both highly committed activists and products of the black movement. Lazaro started by showing me a PowerPoint presentation on the programs and projects of the Institute. I was taking notes furiously when he offered to give me a CD copy of the presentation, which I assumed he makes on a regular basis for visitors and sponsors. The Institute will be celebrating its 15th anniversary next year. It has been an ambitious mission to help improve the educational opportunities of disadvantaged black youths by helping prepare them for university entrance exams, providing extra instruction and helping them secure study abroad scholarships. He proudly pointed out the students they had been able to place in local and American universities, including Howard, Morehouse and Smith.

They are particularly proud not only of the academic and vocational training they provide, but also the consciousness raising they have been able to promote. They adhere strongly to Steve Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness, the primacy of black mental liberation and self-empowerment. The Institute has won many awards. As he talked I thought how great it would be for the Institute to establish a linkage program with a South African institution. I mentioned the University of South Africa (UNISA), headed by Barney Pitso, Biko's closest comrade in arms, who I mentioned, to their excitement, was a friend and I would tell him about the Institute next time we met.

The second part of the discussion was led by Silvio. Taynar provided a brief bio. He is 41 and an economist as well as a professor at the State University of Feira de Santana. He also works with the city's office of Ministério da Fazenda (Ministry of Finance). He is a well-known political figure committed to combating inequalities and injustices against Afro-Brazilians in Brazilian society. His passion was unmistakable. I decided to ask him about and focus our discussion on the development and state of the black movement.

It was a wide-ranging conversation. He began by noting that this movement has sought to promote Afro-Brazilians' identity as black people. Notions of blackness and Africanness have been driven both from internal developments within Brazil as well as derived from discourses about blackness and struggles for civil rights and affirmative action in the diaspora, especially in the United States.

From the Caribbean came the Pan-African influences of Marcus Garvey and many others. Abdias do Nascimento played a crucial role in transmitting and connecting these influences, which were popularized here in Bahia through the songs of reggae legend Bob Marley, the *blocos afro* that allowed and helped them to know Africa's reality and the black reality. People may not have understood literally the words that Marley sang, but they felt them. In short, reggae had a huge influence here, although once it started making money, whites appropriated it and now control its production. So when Burning Spear came to Salvador last year to participate in the Summer Festival, his tour was controlled by white promoters.

Lazaro chimed in to note the same has happened to the *Mercado Cultural*. Once an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice or product becomes "more" visible and organized, it becomes bureaucratized and commercialized. This is a problem for us now, he said. The black movement produced a market, an ethnic market, for Afro-Brazilian cultural production and consumption, but it no longer belongs to the black movement. Oh, yes,

Afro-Brazilians might wear the African shirts, the locks, but the whites are the ones making those products and pocketing the money. If we are to succeed as activists, we also have to become entrepreneurs, to control our cultural products and invest the profits in our communities, he maintained.

Even black beauty products are controlled by white businesses, including multinationals. We have not only been reduced to consumers, but some of the products we consume undermine black identity and the black movement. Take the hair straightening and skin lightening creams. They are produced and marketed as if blacks have recessive genes that need to be rectified, Lazaro laughed. This is what Louis Gordon talks about as white normativity, that whiteness is normal, the rest is different, an aberration.

Lazaro and Silvio have visited the continent. Silvio went to an economics conference in Angola. It was the feeling of returning home, he joked. It was the sensation of returning home except this time it wasn't via a slave ship. There is something about visiting Africa from the diaspora. He wondered whether Africans on the continent can feel or even understand what that means. But what surprised him, indeed shocked him, was the need to talk about black consciousness on African soil. The damage the Portuguese did to the minds of Angolans is no joke. They annihilated their identity, their sense of self-respect, their self-confidence, he maintained.

One evening Silvio was in a bar in Luanda and he was joined by this dude who was lighter than him. He heard him refer to his hair in the same way he hears people here speak. The man said, "I have bad hair," or something like that. And Silvio listened and waited as he spoke, then he asked him, "so what is good hair?" The man stumbled for an answer. Another example was when Silvio asked a young economist at the conference why people used Portuguese names. Where were the African names? The economist replied, "Africanness is in your attitude. It has nothing to do with a name." So then, Silvio asked him, if it had nothing to do with names, then why had the Portuguese not taken their names?" The Portuguese did not adopt your names." Silvio later realized that people who held onto their traditional names were from the south of Angola, a region under the sway of Jonas Savimbi, a man who was, of course, crazy.

So visiting Angola was a fantastic experience for him, but it took away his idealization of Africa, the false imagination of African purity and authenticity that one often finds in the diaspora. He encountered a real Africa to connect his ideas to, an Africa that suffered from enormous inequalities, like in Brazil, where many people are also disenfranchised. He learned that the African elites are as cruel as the elites in Brazil. And that made him understand even more what Steve Biko was trying to say with black consciousness, that black consciousness was missing in Africa as well. This has to be the foundation of liberation in Africa and Brazil, the powerful thread that connects the two.

Only then will the potential of both Africa and Brazil be realized, Silvio insisted, the possibility of getting out of the box of what Europe planned and created for the world. Now, there is little that Africa can do for the world. At best, Africa is seen as a resource when the conversation turns to space, the environment, and animals. Economists see it as an experimental lab for their theories whether Marxist or neo-liberal. But development involves something a lot deeper. We need to talk about mentality and behavior, about believing in ourselves. That is the foundation of any social, economic, cultural, and political development. In other words, it's about freeing ourselves from mental slavery, he sighed.

We discussed the ways educational systems in both Africa and Brazil had largely failed to educate people about each other. The media, both on the continent and in the diaspora,

has also done a miserable job. Consequently, African peoples across the Atlantic largely know each other through highly mediated stereotypes, mostly the stereotypes of mutual disparagement. Meaningful engagement will only come through direct exchanges and experiences with each other, or encounters coordinated by responsible media outlets controlled by Africans.

The educational and intellectual challenges are immense, Lazaro said. It saddens him when he thinks about it; about the big role European scholarship, from science to history to philosophy, has played in creating unequal perceptions, in justifying the supposed inferiority of black people in relation to Europeans. He studied philosophy, but only later did he find out that what they call Greek philosophy actually has African—Egyptian—origins, and still the academy doesn't acknowledge it as such. It is imperative to increase the numbers of black scholars in the universities, to vigorously challenge Eurocentric constructions of knowledge, and to promote African contributions to global civilization. The two brothers talked excitedly about the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*.

By the time we left Silvio and Lazaro, my head was buzzing. I was struck by how immersed they were in radical and Afrocentric tenets of Anglophone and Francophone African and diasporan thought. How many of us in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds are informed about Lusophone diasporan thought? Clearly, the Pan-African world has its own hierarchies and asymmetries.

July 11, 2006

We had two meetings scheduled for today: the first was with Paulo Cesar Oliveira de Jesus, currently a PhD student looking at the role of slavery and the slave trade in the formation of the Bahian elite from 1830 to 1850. Veronica suggested that we meet at Paulo's office. I took a taxi around 12:30 p.m. for the 1:00 p.m. meeting. During this ride, and another ride to the second meeting, it became more evident that Salvador is a very large city with the usual mixture of ultra-modern skyscrapers, both offices and apartments, and older buildings representing successive moments of urban architectural styles, as well as the ever-present decrepit dwellings of the poor. The main multi-lane highways crisscrossing the city are not as congested as Caracas, save for at the occasional intersections. You hardly see luxury cars such as BMWs and Mercedes Benzes that are such a common sight in several African cities from Johannesburg to Nairobi. Nor do you see the kind of battered cars, taxis, minivans, and buses with their trail of fumes that are a common sight in cities like Dakar. There is an apparent orderliness, functionality, even physical beauty to the city, which would strike anyone from a crowded and chaotic Third World city.

I arrived at Paulo's building on time, but Veronica was not there. I waited for a little while, and then decided to go to the 4th floor to see if Veronica had already gone up. The secretary did not speak English, so she called for a young man who did. He was only too glad to welcome me and to share with me information that he was a graduate student currently on holiday from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. He hoped I was enjoying my first visit to his city and sampling its African heritage. Before long, Veronica walked in with her trade-mark smile and an apology for her lateness. She was wearing white shorts and a green top and her hair was let loose flowing to her shoulders. She noted when we were in a taxi to our second interview that whenever she was dressed like that everyone assumed she was an American tourist and treated her differently which she

found quite amusing at times and annoying at other times. We talked about the representational power of dress; the discursive and performative dimensions of appearance.

When Paulo walked into the library where we were sitting, the young man excused himself, beaming at how glad he was to have met me. Paulo extended a warm greeting and said—in English—that he spoke no English, and I responded—in English—that I spoke no Portuguese. We all laughed. He is probably in his early to mid-30s. Slightly balding, he was wearing an earring and a casual light green shirt. As he talked, it was obvious he was very sharp and passionate about his research. He began by summarizing his research theme and then he responded to a series of questions I asked him.

He outlined the kinds of sources he was using—primary documents composed of Bahian journals, diaries and court testimonies as well as archival documents in Angola where he spent a little over two weeks last year. He is looking at the discourse on slavery and the slave trade at the time and, more importantly, at how the slavers and slave traders in Bahia split their earnings to invest in banks and industry and to dominate the economy and become the elites of Bahian society, as well as philanthropists. The slave traffickers had family ties across the Atlantic world, including Angola. During the period 1830–1850, the focus of his research, the slave trade had been abolished above the equator, and the Portuguese traffickers concentrated on regions below the equator, hence the importance of Angola. He is interested in examining why and how the slave trade between Bahia and Angola continued, indeed intensified after abolition. He is examining the records of those who were arrested or stopped by the British and how they subsequently returned to Bahia and came to be seen as pillars of Bahian society.

Among the traffickers, he noted, most were descendants of the original Portuguese settlers in Bahia, Rio, Pernambuco, and Angola. A few were English. The enslaved people freed from the high seas after abolition of the slave trade became property of the Brazilian government and were used in several industries, especially fishing. Some of them gave testimony at the trials of the traffickers, which provided an incredibly rich source of information about the organization of the slave trade and the origins of the enslaved peoples. He would like to go back to Angola to investigate further the cultural, political, and economic dynamics of the slave trade during this period. It is important to emphasize that the enslaved peoples freed from the traffickers were not free; they were slaves of the state. Their freedom came in 1888 following the abolition of slavery in Brazil as a whole.

As for relations among the successive waves of slaves coming to Brazil and the nature of resistance to slavery, he noted the slaves not only came at different times but also from different parts of western and central Africa. Once they came, they developed new communities that involved complex reconstructions of African societies. Some of the communities were called *malungos*, consisting of people who came on the same boat; others were called *nations*, consisting of reconstituted ethnicities; and then there were the Catholic brotherhoods and sisterhoods. These communities provided mechanisms to create new social solidarities. Those who came after the international abolition of the slave trade (called free in name but not in reality) were integrated into the existing communities.

Resistance took many forms. Runaways formed *quilombos*, both temporary and permanent. Other forms of resistance included the killing of slave masters and slave suicides. There were also armed rebellions, including the famous Males Rebellion of 1835. Strikes were also common. In a big strike in 1857, for example, slaves stopped carrying things around the city. This resistance shaped the terrain of slave society in Brazil and the formation of identity. The Males Rebellion had a powerful impact on Brazilian history.

It engendered fear among the slave owners and the slave traders, which contributed to the abolition of the slave trade in Brazil in 1850 and slavery in 1888.

On the question of why Brazil became the dominant destination of the trade and traffic for enslaved Africans—absorbing up to 40% of all slaves—he attributed this to two main factors. First, the sheer size of the plantation economy, comprised of the sugar plantations, coffee plantations, etc., which spawned an insatiable demand for labor. Second, the slave owners were exceptionally brutal because of the relative cheapness of slaves. They worked the slaves to death and the rate of slave reproduction was relatively low. After the abolition of slavery, no migration from Africa was allowed, no economic or political contacts were maintained with Africa by the Brazilian postcolonial state. Brazil tried to erase memories of Africa among the freed slaves, who were provided with no assistance to rebuild their lives. Nevertheless, memories of Africa remained deep.

As for the development of Afro-Brazilian identities, he noted that the conditions of life created different types of identities. A collective black identity developed because the slaves and their descendants were and felt excluded, exclusion bonded them as members of the same community. Afro-Brazilian identity was forged and reconstituted through struggles. The first struggle was for abolition; the struggle by the enslaved not to be called and treated as slaves. After abolition, dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions created the impetus for the development of the black movement, which affected the development of Afro-Brazilian identities in new ways.

I was curious about his impressions of Angolan society, and Angolan historians' impressions more specifically, how they perceived the Afro-Brazilian diaspora and the slave trade. He emphasized that he was only in Angola for a short period and that his contacts were sporadic and he had brief formal conversations. He spent much of his time at the Angolan archives where he mostly interacted with a Brazilian who works in Virginia and a woman who worked at Agostino Neto University. On a personal level, he was given a great welcome. He felt he was at home. He stressed that he is not an activist but a militant. Bahia has strong connections with Angola; Bahia was born in Angola, he said. When he arrived, he had an immediate sense that he was at home. He was familiar with the situations and problems in Angola because he has many Brazilian and Angolan friends who live here. In contrast to Silvio, he found a strong sense of black consciousness, a widespread awareness and even concern about the dominance of light-skinned people in the corridors of power. What he found missing, however, was an African consciousness, a feeling of Pan-African brotherhood.

In the course of the conversation, he recommended several books and at the end gave me a long list (31 pages) of key publications on Afro-Brazilian history and culture, which will be invaluable for this study. As we parted, he gave me a hug and flashed a smile saying he looked forward to hearing back from me.

From downtown Salvador, we took a long taxi ride to Jorge Amado University where we were scheduled to meet Professor Juvenal de Carvalho, head of the History department. The university is located in a newer part of Salvador that has gradually eaten into an ancient Atlantic coastal forest rapidly filling up with glittering apartments, office blocks, shopping arcades, and smooth multi-lane highways periodically intersected by flyovers. The university itself bears the hallmarks of an institution that is better endowed and maintained than the average public institution, certainly compared to the Federal University of Rio campus that I visited with Allesandra. The reception stands a few feet from the entrance; to its left are a café, a bank, and a shop. The attendants, a young black woman and a young black man, each wearing a blue security officer's uniform, welcomed us.

They became even friendlier when Veronica explained I was an African professor from the U.S. who had come to meet Professor Carvalho. The young woman gave me a second look, murmuring "Doctor," sounding quite impressed. Veronica and I laughed. We discovered the building is built underground. The history office was a couple or so floors underground. Unfortunately, Professor Carvalho had already left. Veronica called him and we agreed to reschedule after the CIAD II Conference.

We had been delayed in going to Jorge Amano University because, from Paulo's office, we had gone to the convention center where CIAD II will start tomorrow. We felt it was crucial that I get my registration sorted out before the opening of the conference. To my surprise and delight, my registration package was ready and we were out of the convention center within half an hour. What a pleasant difference from the registration madness of CIAD I in Dakar two years ago. My expectations for CIAD II were raised accordingly!

From Jorge Amano's we took a taxi back to the hotel. Veronica dropped me at the gate. We agreed to communicate if any interview possibilities cropped up over the next few days during the course of the conference. The hotel lobby was filled with CIAD II conference delegates and there was a long red carpet from the entrance to the elevators for arriving presidents, several of whom I was told had already arrived. That was around 5:30 p.m. I bumped into Kofi Anyidoho, the well-known Ghanaian writer and scholar who I met earlier in the morning, as well as Jimi Adisa from the African Union and one of the key organizers of the conference. I met him yesterday in the Internet room where he immediately noted that all would go well with CIAD II. Obviously, he was referring to the nasty difficulties I had in getting a refund for the ticket I had to buy at Dakar International Airport to return to the U.S. in October 2004 at the end of CIAD I. I hung out with Kofi, who introduced me to the grandson of Abdias do Nascimento, a pleasant and fast talking young man. He asked us whether we had tickets for the exhibition in honor of his grandfather and when we both answered no, he graciously brought us some. In fact, he arranged for us to drive together with his famous grandfather and his wife, Elisa Larkin Nascimento.

At about 6:30 p.m., when we were scheduled to leave for the exhibition, we met the grandson and his father, Nascimento's son, who did not look old enough to be the father of the young man. A few moments later Nascimento appeared. He was being pushed in a wheelchair. I marveled to finally see the great man. He still has hair, thinning a little in front and all gray. He was wearing a West African shirt over a white undershirt. His wife is white. I didn't know why all along I had assumed she was black ever since I read his fascinating book on Afro-Brazilian nationalism and Pan-Africanism. She is a tall, slim, cheerful woman. An American, she speaks fluent Portuguese.

Later, Kofi confirmed I was not the first to be surprised that Nascimento's wife was white. He recounted the story in 1988 when Nascimento and Elisa visited Ghana. At their farewell dinner, an African-American woman who had been looking tense all evening and drinking a little too much apparently burst out, saying she couldn't understand why Nascimento, his country's greatest figure against racism, a stalwart of the Black Nationalist movement, could dare to marry a white woman. The room went deadly silent. Finally, Nascimento, in a quivering, angry voice, looking straight at the woman, reprimanded her. How dare she ask him such a foolish, self-righteous question when she had not the slightest knowledge about his wife, a woman who was always there for him, who had sacrificed her own career to promote his causes and his work. Which black woman would have done that for him? He had known many black women in his life, but none who would have put up with what Elisa put up with. The dinner ended in renewed silence,

and those present never discussed the matter again. Kofi was then a member of the board of the Du Bois Center and the committee at the University of Ghana that organized Nascimento's visit.

As I listened to the story, I had sympathies for both the African-American woman and for Nascimento: surely, a man has a right to love, to choose to marry whomever he loves; the same, of course, is true for any woman. But Nascimento is also a symbol of his people's struggle and his choice cannot be entirely personal—it sends a loud message of his values, preferences, expectations; and the choice of a partner is the most intimate and public declarations of being and belonging. Many a Black Nationalist leader has confronted this issue as evident in their biographies and autobiographies, from W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the U.S. to Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, and Jomo Kenyatta in Africa. Others followed their hearts and damned the consequences as Sir Seretse Khama, Botswana's first president, did, whose marriage to a white British woman in 1948 created a scandal in southern Africa that had the same year been overtaken by the madness of apartheid in South Africa. I have several personal friends who have grappled with this issue. In the United States, inter-racial marriages still generate passionate debate in the popular black media. I first became conscious of the issue in college in Malawi when we read Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he portrays white women as psychological trophies for black men in a world of white normativity. Intriguingly, we discovered Fanon himself was married to one!

The hall where the exhibition was held is located in Pelourinho, in the heart of old Salvador, the historic center. The place was packed, both outside and inside the hall. Nascimento was helped out of the car and Kofi and I walked behind him and his wife as a path was cleared by the security folks. Cameras were clicking everywhere. It felt funny, like a scene from a bad movie, but I was quite moved by the adoration the crowd showed to Nascimento, Afro-Brazil's greatest icon of the twentieth century. At 92 years old, in terms of U.S. historical figures, he is the embodiment of W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., for his intellectual powers and activism, his fearless nationalism, his strategic thinking, and leadership skills. For decades he has indefatigably fought against Brazilian racism when few dared to call it such because so many were blinded by the myth of racial democracy; he has championed Pan-Africanism when the movement was little-known in the country of his birth and its Anglophone and Francophone leaders ignored their brethren in South America, where Africa's largest diaspora lives in relative obscurity.

He has been persecuted, forced to flee into exile periodically, and denounced by racists who wore the benevolent labels of liberation and Marxism or cloaked themselves in the cruel fictions of creolization, *métissage*, and *mestizo* nationhood. He has seen Brazilian governments come and go; right wing governments, left wing governments, military governments, and democratic governments as the situation of his people remained intractably marked by the marginalization of economic poverty and political powerlessness, and by the structural and petty persecutions and perversions of racism. But he has persevered through it all, witnessing the black movement in Brazil and nationalist movements in the Pan-African world grow and win some remarkable victories. The winds of change, long deflected from the shores of this promising land, are now shaking the citadels of institutionalized racism and disenfranchisement. The exhibition tonight would have been unthinkable two decades ago. The prophet is finally being heard by his persecutors at home.

The exhibition fills four floors. It is a celebration, a tribute to a life more than fully lived, a life filled with art, literature, and social activism, a passionate political life, a life

of continuous struggle, meaning and hope. All four floors and the rooms on each floor radiate with colorful paintings collected from all corners of the Pan-African world, and with brooding, powerful sculptures, as well as posters, magazines, newspaper stories, and video clips recording Nascimento's encounters with theater, politics and culture, and with some of the greatest icons of the Pan-Africanist movement and the invisible corners of black Brazil hidden in the quilombos and the favelas. People walked throughout the exhibition with the gravity of a religious procession: the voices, the whispers, even the laughter evoked wonder, pride, and profound appreciation. I felt humbled to be in the presence of such a large life, proclaiming its defiant humanity from the paintings and clips on the walls, the sculptures staring from the floor, and Nascimento's voice wafting from the video playing in one of the rooms. I took pictures like an ecstatic child might do in a candy store.

The Nascimento family decided to go to a private dinner, so Kofi and I took a taxi back to the hotel. Kofi expressed his profound pride in Nascimento's life, exhibited in the hall, in the way only a fine poet can: with a few delicate words of wonder that sounded like a poem in the making.

July 12, 2006

Today was the official opening of the CIAD II Conference. There was some confusion in the hotel lobby concerning transport to the convention center. There was considerable commotion as well as some important officials and their minions bulged in and out of the lobby including Alpha Konare, the African Union (AU) Chairperson. I was standing with two people I had met last night in the restaurant for a late dinner after the Nascimento exhibition. One was Gibril Faal, a Gambian scholar and consultant based in London, and the other was Chinua Akukwe, a professor and health activist at George Washington University. When the commotion increased, indicating that some presidents were coming, we decided to take a taxi to ensure that we were at the convention center before their arrival and the inevitable tight security.

We got to the convention center a good hour before the scheduled opening of the conference at 10:00 a.m. For a moment, we were a bit at a loss, for we did not know and could not seem to find out where the auditorium was. The AU Vice-Chair and his wife seemed to be in the same predicament, a clear indication that the AU protocol people had messed up. As the five of us stood by the elevators wondering where to go, the former Brazilian ambassador to Nigeria and one of the organizers of the conference came along and we rode with them to the 3rd floor. Security was very tight, with uniformed personnel, their guns discreetly hidden, and I am sure there were plainclothes security milling around. After going through the metal detectors, before which we had to show our registration badges, we were given button lapels and were led to collect the earphones for audio translation services. Strangely, they asked us to leave our passports before getting the earphones. I hadn't brought mine and the AU Vice-Chair protested.

The AU's social or cultural affairs commissioner, a short and rather plump woman with straight hair that made her look uglier than she probably is, intervened and her assistant left her passport and we were all given the earphones. When we entered the convention center we realized we were actually quite early, for the room was still largely empty. Jimi Adisa and others were busy at the dais arranging and rearranging the seating

arrangements and the technical people were testing the sound system. We all sat in the row of seats designated for the AU, although the Vice-Chair and his wife were later moved to their designated seats in the first row. The rows behind us held several country seats, apparently some presidents had come with sizeable delegations. Further behind were rows for free seating.

I walked around the hall as people gradually trickled in. As is often the case at these conferences, part of the fun is meeting friends and old acquaintances, some of whom one hasn't seen for a while, sometimes years. I bumped into my CODESRIA buddies, Ebrima Sall and his lovely wife, Awa, with whom I took a picture. They looked so good together. Awa asked about Cassandra and I tried to explain why she was not here. Ebrima asked about the green book on African diasporas I was commissioned to do several years ago. I explained that the more I worked on it and indeed the more I conducted my research the more I realized the gaps in my knowledge and the need to incorporate studies by diasporan scholars in these regions who often are not known because their work does not circulate in international academic networks as much as that of their white compatriots. We agreed to discuss the matter further in the course of the conference.

It was then that he broke the sad news of our mutual friend Chachage Seithy Chachage's death in Dar es Salaam. Chachage had hosted Cassandra and me in Dar es Salaam in December 2002 and we had met many times at CODESRIA conferences. He was a fiercely independent academic. He was very critical of globalization and the currently fashionable neo-liberal and post-modernist discourses, and passionately committed to the old ideals of progressive African nationalism and socialism. He was extremely funny, an effect of his deliberate and sometimes not so deliberate subversion of the English language. When we were in Dar es Salaam, he took Cassandra and me to visit the house he and his wife had built on the outskirts of campus, which he was clearly proud of. When we saw him at the CODESRIA General Assembly last December in Maputo, Mozambique, Cassandra and I remarked that he looked much better than when we last saw him. He had apparently stopped smoking and drinking alcohol. I will always remember him for his principled stand against injustice and Africa's self-serving political and economic elites. I remember the critique he wrote against the University of Cape Town when he resigned to return to the University of Dar es Salaam because of the intellectual bankruptcy and xenophobia in the country, which was only emerging from the dark days of apartheid. However, South Africa thought it was far superior to the rest of Africa, a testimony to the power of the myths of white supremacy for surviving formal political decolonization.

I ran into more familiar faces, including Adebayo Olukoshi, CODESRIA's Executive Secretary, with his ever-smiling dimples and playful handshake, behind which lies a brilliant mind and a shrewd and an indefatigable administrator who has revived CODESRIA from its doldrums under the misguided Achille Mbembe, who white Africanists seem to love because he denigrates Africa, which they are afraid of doing directly themselves. There was Takwiya Manuh, Director of the African Institute at the University of Ghana, Legon, who bears an uncanny resemblance to my late mother—the same short height, flawless black skin, wickedly loving smile, and small twinkling eyes. And there was Denise Campbell, a young activist from Toronto who once headed the National Action Committee on the Status of Women who I first met at an AU workshop in Trinidad in June 2004 and at CIAD I in Dakar several months later. She looks like a taller, more grown up Natasha.

The meeting did not begin until about 11:00 a.m. By then the hall was packed. The convener announced the entry of President Lula. A section of the Brazilian audience went

into a chant, "Lula, Lula, Lula," as they clapped, frenzied, in unison. One after another, the other presidents were announced and they made their way to the dais—Presidents Festus Mogae of Botswana, Pedro Pries of Cape Verde, Nguema Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, and Abdul Wade of Senegal, as well as the new Jamaican Prime Minister, Portia Sampson Miller, the island's first female leader, the Vice President of Tanzania, Konare of the AU and Wangari Maathai, Africa's first woman Nobel Laureate. They were joined by the moderator, Vice-President of the Senegalese National Assembly and two *rapporteurs*, as well as the co-chairs of the CIAD II, Gilberto Gil, Brazil's Minister of Culture and one of the country's foremost musicians, and Frene Ginwala, the former speaker of the South African Parliament.

As impressive as the line up was, it fell far short of the more than twenty heads of state that were originally expected. In the letter of invitation, we had been told that all living African and Diaspora Nobel Laureates had been invited, and so were heads of the UN, British Commonwealth, Arab League, and Le Francophonie. Such is the pageantry and performance of power that the mood in the huge Yemanjá Auditorium was electrifying with excitement and even expectation. There was a feeling that this was a historic moment in the relations between Africa and its diasporas. Lula did not disappoint. In his brief opening remarks he welcomed his fellow leaders, the delegates, and participants to the conference; and to Brazil, Bahia and Salvador, noting the enduring connections between them and Africa which are rooted in history and sustained by a common quest for development. The role of the intellectuals in fostering the permanent dialogue between Brazil and Africa, he stressed, was crucial.

The other leaders largely ignored Lula's example and offered long, predictable speeches with the usual buzz words of Pan-Africanism, solidarity, and South-South cooperation. Wade, who fancies himself as Senegal's Leopold Senghor and Africa's Kwame Nkrumah, invoked the history of the slave trade that built Bahia and Brazil and encouraged the strengthening of trans-Atlantic links between Africa and Latin America generally, and the formation of a Pan-African alliance more specifically, in which universities and intellectuals could spearhead the creation of Pan-Africanist clubs to facilitate contacts, exchange ideas, and defend our collective interests as peoples of Africa and African descent.

Konare followed in his booming voice. As the former professor of history that he is, he recounted the connected histories of Brazil and Africa from the era of the slave trade, through which Africa provided people whose descendants now contribute more than half the country's population and who provided the foundations of its economic, social, and cultural development. He paid tribute to the icons of the Afro-Brazilian struggle against exploitation, including Abdias do Nascimento who was sitting on the dais, and Jorge Amado, among others. Africa and Brazil, he declared, complete each other, and Africans in Africa and in the diaspora share the ties of history, values and aspirations. Only by working together can they realize the ambitious project of an African renaissance, a political project that requires a clear strategy, that seeks to end the marginalization of Africans in Africa and in the diaspora, and that will culminate in the foundation of the United States of Africa.

Konare was followed by the governor of Bahia and mayor of Salvador. The governor underscored that African labor built Bahia, 75% of whose population is of African descent. Bahian diaspora culture, forged from the many cultures and languages of the enslaved Africans, is not only an indispensable part of the state's and country's cultural patrimony or heritage but is now being exported to the rest of the world—from *candomblé* to *capoeira* which were an integral part of the struggle for freedom. He boasted that the University

of Bahia was one of the first to implement the affirmative action quota system. The mayor offered the conference a hearty welcome and noted that this was the most important event for the African-descended community in Salvador and Brazil. Salvador, Brazil's first capital, was formed primarily by its African presence, it was the first to implement the law of 2003 mandating the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian histories in schools. He mentioned that various education and social programs were being implemented. Remarkably, both the governor and mayor are white in a state that is 75% black, and a city that is only 13% white. Telling statistics, indeed.

The Minister for Racial Equality, who followed the two dark-suited governor and mayor, brought a passion to her delivery that seemed to energize the audience. She observed that the conference was fundamental to current political life and developments in Brazil. Racism was now officially recognized as a problem that affected Brazilian society, thanks to the long history of struggle, from those who fought against slavery to the activists of the contemporary black movement. These struggles enabled the adoption of affirmative action and racial equality as a goal of public policy. She stressed that the fight against racism was a continuing battle since racism was still prevalent in Brazil. Her voice choking with pride, she proclaimed her delight, as a black woman and an activist, the joy she felt at this moment to invite President Lula to bestow a national award honoring Abdias do Nascimento for a long life of struggle against racism and for the uplift of the black people of Brazil and to make Brazil a more democratic and humane society. The audience jumped to its feet; deafening cheers and hand clapping engulfing the auditorium as President Lula bestowed the award to Nascimento.

Then we were back to another humdrum speech by President Mogae who lamented our collective failure to educate ourselves about our mutual histories, a malaise he proceeded to demonstrate by observing that he had only learned recently that David Livingstone, the nineteenth century Scottish missionary explorer, had an African diaspora companion. Then he went into an incoherent discussion about the formation of the African National Congress in South Africa and ANC clones in the region, and ended with an observation that continental Africans and diasporan Africans constitute a distinctive community in global civilization so that unity among them is essential. He noted that the AU had recognized the diaspora as the sixth region and the challenge was to turn this into a reality. Like the others, he paid lip service to the role of intellectuals and emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary engagements between the social and natural sciences as inspirers and implementers of the African renaissance project. Thankfully, his speech was short. He ought to fire his speech writer.

The conference came alive again when Stevie Wonder was asked to speak. He had entered the auditorium an hour or so earlier to great murmuring and some surprise. He was led to the front, three rows in front of where I was sitting. Besides him was a slim woman who had the profile of Akosua, Abena Busia's sister, and sure enough, Abena walked in front to whisper something to her. As they talked, Abena saw me and waved and asked Akosua to turn; she did and smiled. After what looked like back-and-forth negotiations, Wonder was led to the dais. The crowd registered its approval by giving him thunderous applause.

Wonder was a delight to listen to. He began by imploring us to know our histories, noting that some in Africa don't know about slavery and some in the diaspora don't know about African history. He proceeded to make an impassioned appeal for Pan-African unity of purpose, peace, for human rights, for love. He read the lyrics of his new song; he then sang the last stanza, his trademark smile beaming on his swaying face as the long

locks moved along. He urged the crowd to join in and we did so with gusto, turning the staid political show into a carnival of joyous celebration, affirming Pan-African solidarity in a way that only music and art and expressive culture can. Even the presidents seemed to wake up from their official somnolence. Wonder stole the show. When he finished, the audience gave him a standing ovation and many people rushed near the dais to take pictures. As he walked out, a crowd followed him out and several commented that it felt like the conference was over. As great as his performance was, it was more a tribute to star power than either the profundity of his comments or the power of his vision, let alone its militancy. It underscored not only the potency of culture in general, but the inordinate investment, among people long marginalized from the centers of political and economic power, in popular, expressive culture as an arena of vitality and creativity, difference and identity.

Stevie Wonder was followed by three presidents. Few seemed to pay much attention to the Cape Verde president who talked about the need to fight Afropessimism, to strengthen the relationship between Africa and the diaspora, and to promote human rights. He also mentioned the cross-fertilization of ideas between Afro-Brazilian activists and freedom fighters from Angola to Cape Verde, giving the example of Jorge Amado's influence. Ghana's president paid homage to President Lula for taking relations between Africa and Brazil seriously—noting he had invited 17 African countries including Ghana—and for improving the lives of Afro-Brazilians through education and progressive legislation. He contended that African leaders and intellectuals were committed to Africa's revitalization in the new era of globalization and gave the example of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). He emphasized that good governance was a cornerstone of Africa's rebirth and that Ghana was championing the interests of Africans at home and abroad. He informed the audience that the country's Ministry of Tourism had been redesignated as the Ministry of Tourism and diaspora Affairs. Also, a Joseph Project had been launched (named after the biblical Joseph, I presume), and invitations for Ghana's yearlong 50th independence anniversary next year would be extended to the diaspora.

The Ghanaian president got a much better reception because the commotion over Stevie Wonder had died by the time he spoke. Equatorial Guinea's president received a muted reception among those knowledgeable about the tyranny and corruption of his oil-rich nation. He called attention to the specific links between Equatorial Guinea and Brazil as mediated by the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and globalization. He denounced colonial education for perpetrating what he called cultural genocide, and Africa's contemporary crisis of values: its failure to integrate modernity and tradition, to enrich African cultures and assimilate them for development. He argued that intellectuals and artists from Afro-America have shown the possibilities of cultural synthesis, from which Africa could learn in making its own synthesis. He boasted that it was at a conference in Equatorial Guinea, held in 1984, that the concept of Afro-Ibero-Americanism was born. When he started talking about human rights and democracy, I wanted to walk out. I finally did when they gave the floor to Wade for another rambling speech.

In the foyer of the auditorium, which was packed with people eating, drinking, looking for drinks and snacks, mingling and talking with the energy and excitement of newly forged acquaintances and renewed old friendships, I bumped into Abena Busia and Takwiyya, with whom I took pictures. I also ran into Carol Boyce Davies, whom I reminded still had not written the blurb for my forthcoming book and sent me the papers she had promised when we last met in Miami several months ago from the conference on African

diasporas in Asia, held in Goa, India last January. She promised to attend to both matters once she returned and I asked her to inform her husband that I had only received his message inviting me to be a keynote speaker at a conference on science and technology while in transit in Miami on my way from Venezuela to Brazil. I can't access messages on my cell phone outside of the U.S.

I went back into the auditorium once the Jamaican Prime Minister was speaking. Both her message and the delivery were powerful. She began by paying tribute to Marcus Garvey, Jamaica's national hero, and Bob Marley, the legendary reggae singer, both great Pan-Africanists and illustrious examples of Jamaica's involvement in African affairs. The connections between Africa and Jamaica, and the diaspora as a whole, she declared, are deep, strong, and enduring. The diaspora has a responsibility to raise its voice against Africa's marginalization, to fight for Africa in world economic forums in so far as economic liberation is the greatest challenge of our age. She noted Africa's challenge of poverty and disease and called on the diaspora to use all its diplomatic and political muscle to stop Africa's modern holocaust of HIV/AIDS, which is unacceptable. While the G8 declared last year "the year of Africa," it is Africans and the diaspora who must be in the forefront of Africa's liberation. They must make every year a year of Africa until the continent realizes its destiny, reaches its full potential. As African peoples, she reminded the audience, we have survived slavery and indignity on our self-esteem and humanity. The sons and daughters of slaves have survived and made some remarkable achievements. We will survive and succeed. She finished with an invitation to Lula to visit the Caribbean and Jamaica in particular. She closed with the defiant and stirring words of Marcus Garvey. She was given a standing ovation.

After her speech, I went outside to escape another presentation by another male leader, this time the Vice-President of Tanzania. In the foyer I ran into Godwin Murunga, a fine young scholar scheduled to finish his PhD at Northwestern University later this year, and Eddy Maloka, the ousted head of the Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA). I first met Eddy at a conference in Bamako, Mali, in 1994, organized by the Association of African Historians and most recently, when I chaired a review team of AISA in 2005. Then I ran into Abebe Zegeye, the itinerant and rather entrepreneurial Ethiopian scholar currently based at the University of South Africa.

I returned to the auditorium when Lula began giving his closing remarks. As if inspired by the lengthy speeches of his colleagues and no longer aware of time, he delivered a long address focusing largely on standard themes of Brazilian foreign policy interspersed with appropriate references to Africa. He stressed the need to reform multilateral bodies, including the UN Security Council, to reflect current geopolitical and economic realities, to promote the democratization of the UN to ensure that Africa and Latin America are truly represented. He commented on the need for the richer countries to open their markets and for the U.S. and EU to reduce their agricultural subsidies. At the forthcoming G8 meetings, he said, world leaders need to intervene to reach an agreement that the negotiations have obviously failed to do on Africa. Lula noted that trade between the continent and Brazil is growing fast and is now worth \$12 billion. The Atlantic Ocean was obviously not a barrier; it had certainly not been to the slave traders and the colonizers. What we have to do in the twenty-first century is think of what kind of Africa we want, what kind of global South, what kind of integration and linkages between Africa and Brazil should be developed that change the historic patterns of Africa's marginalization and exploitation. Globalization and today's model of development should not be allowed to reproduce the

colonial system. He continued, saying, it is often said Africa is poor because of the race of its people, because of lack of education. Africa's current poverty and development challenges ought to be attributed to the fact that for 300 years its people and resources were used to build western societies.

Turning to Brazil, he noted the creation of the Ministry of Diversity to promote racial equality. Progress has been slow because of the difficulties in changing the law and politics at the requisite speed. But the debate about racism and affirmative action in Brazil is not a bad thing. It reflects the achievement of the black movement. He noted that 63,000 blacks had entered universities in Brazil for the first time because of affirmative action. Overturning entrenched discrimination would be a long process. Brazil was an African country; despite its limited resources, it now gave priority to its relationship with Africa. He proposed the possibilities of sharing renewable vegetable oil biotechnology with Africa. By this time, he had begun switching from topic to topic, off his original script. He talked about the importance of education to break cycles of poverty among the poor; the need for intellectuals not to engage in conceptual discourse only but also to discuss practical issues on how to resolve the problems facing the peoples of Africa and the global South. He denounced the tendency of rich countries to provide minimal concessions while making claims that they are giving aid; the importance of developing and pursuing consistent policies that are bottom-up rather than top-down, the failure of which will lead to a historic mistake on the scale of the slave trade; he commented on the November 30 Summit of the South American and African continents and the need for greater cooperation among the two continents to reverse the tendency of always going to the U.S. and Europe for help and handouts.

He concluded by saying that we have no right to excuse ourselves from discussing the most pressing issues of the age and the globe. This century could be ours, as the nineteenth century was Europe's, and the twentieth was for the United States and Europe as well. The audience clapped heartily when he finished, but I suspected more out of merriment than anything else. It was after 3:00 p.m. Gibril and Chinua found me in the foyer and we agreed to return to the hotel for a late lunch rather than wait for the scheduled plenary presentation on gender which was supposed to have started at 3:15 p.m. As we waited for the van to take us to the hotel, we watched Lula work the crowds before getting into his car, which looked like an ordinary Toyota Camry.

It turned out that there were many more who decided to return to their respective hotels and miss the afternoon plenary. Among them were several prominent African feminists. We later heard in the evening that the plenary was well attended. The interest in the conference from the community is indeed overwhelming. After lunch, I went to my room for some rest. At 6:00 p.m., I went to the lobby for transport to a reception hosted by the governor of Bahia state. On the bus I encountered Horace Campbell, and at the next hotel we picked up Toyin Falola among others. Toyin sat next to me; we discussed my impending move to UIC, and he revealed that the Dean there called him for his evaluation of my candidacy and that of the other two candidates, both of whom he also knew. Then we discussed the challenges of thinking about where to retire, investments, and our workaholicism, which he called a disease. We jokingly agreed we could only retire to a place where we would have enough work to keep us occupied.

Getting to the reception took twice as long as it should have because the driver mistakenly took us to the governor's residence instead of the public palace somewhere in the city where the function was being held. Almost an hour later we arrived and we were greeted

in the hall by a group of colorfully dressed and elegant black women. The reception was on the grounds of the palace. Among the people I met and talked to were four African-American activist intellectuals—Molefi Asante, Michael Eric Dyson, Sheila Walker, and James Early, Director of Cultural Heritage Policy at the Smithsonian Institution. I had last met Asante and Walker at the CIAD I in Dakar. I informed Asante of my impending move to Chicago and he said we should keep in touch. I asked Walker whether she had responded to the conference invitation from Trinidad where the two of us had been invited as keynote speakers. She hadn't, which made me feel a little better, for I hadn't either. It was the first time I had met Dyson. He seemed so much shorter and chubbier than when I had seen him on television. He was with his wife.

Never shy of self-promotion, President Wade suddenly appeared with a large entourage. Before long, we heard the throbbing drum beats and pulsating voices of Senegalese singers on a specially constructed platform. The music and dancing tore through the clear full moonlit sky with the joyous sounds and fancy footwork of the energetic troupe. Once the singing ended, Wade and his entourage left. It was not long before Gibril and I left for the vans waiting outside the palace to take us back to the hotel. It was nearly 10:30 p.m. when we got back. It has been a long day, indeed.

July 13, 2006

Today was the second day of the CIAD II Conference, during which I made my presentation. As we left the hotel for the Convention Center at 8:30 a.m., I was not yet sure what exactly I would talk about, for the title of the panel was rather vague: "New Trends in the Historiography of Africa and the diaspora: from the Origins to 1850." I decided to listen to the first couple of presenters before making a decision. There were seven of us on the panel and I was to present last.

The room was full; perhaps there were 150 people. As I listened to the first presenter, I decided to give an overview of African historiography. The first presenter, Charles Akibode from Cape Verde, talked about the historiography of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery. The second Luiz Felipe Alencastro, discussed nineteenth-century Brazilian historiography. The third, Cornelio Caley from Angola, discussed written and oral African archives and the dangers of using the former in African historiography and the superiority of the latter. The fourth, Paulino de Jesus Francisco Cardoso, presented a scathing critique of white and racist Brazilian historiography. The fifth, Reginaldo A. Ferreira, discussed the development of African studies in the U.S. The sixth, Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, discussed critical readings of written textual sources in African historiography.

I divided my presentation into three parts. First, the dynamics of knowledge production, in which I identified four critical factors, namely, (1) intellectual (ideas, theories, analytical paradigms); (2) institutional (development and nature of universities and research institutions, access to them, funding and organization of research); (3) ideological (import of racism, nationalism, liberation, Marxism, feminism, etc.); and (4) individual (class, race, gender, and nationality of the historian). Second, I outlined the trends in the development of African historians in which I identified three broad periods and their historiographical tendencies. The first is the pre-fifteenth-century era dominated by three successive and coexisting traditions: (1) the Christian tradition as represented by St. Augustine, (2) the Islamic tradition as represented by Ibn Khaldun, and (3) the griot

tradition, as I called it. During the second period from 15th–19th centuries, two new traditions emerged: the Eurocentric and the diaspora vindicationist tradition. The third period emerged in the twentieth century and was characterized by four traditions: (1) the imperialist/Eurocentric, (2) the nationalist, (3) the radical incorporating Marxist, dependency and feminist traditions, and (4) the “posts” — poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcoloniality.

Each of these approaches differed both in their interpretations and methodology, in the types and way they used sources, for example. Finally, I talked about the contemporary challenges of African historiography which I prefaced by underscoring the great achievements made over the last half-century and the field’s theoretical and methodological contribution; the UNESCO and Cambridge histories of Africa were mentioned as compendiums of the African historiographical revolution. I identified two key challenges: expanding the temporal scope and the spatial scale of African history. For the temporal dimension, I noted the differences between the nationalist, radical, and “posts” historians in the periods they give primacy to. I pointed out that as the ancestral home of all humanity, Africa’s history is the oldest and needs to be addressed more systematically, the *longue durée* needs to be captured in our historical writings. I noted the organizational and conceptual challenges in writing such histories and suggested four types of organizational themes: cultural formations, exchanges, technologies, and political formations. First, on the spatial scale, I noted the challenges of conceiving and demarcating geo-historical boundaries — ethnic, national, sub-regional, continental, and global; second, I discussed how to define Africa in contrast to the Eurocentric and Hegelian Africa which refers to sub-Saharan Africa, the Pan-Africanist Africa, and the idea of Africa and its racial, geographical, historical, and discursive/representational inflections; third, I presented Africa’s globality in ancient times, before and after the fifteenth century.

In globalizing African history, then, diaspora studies are crucial. I identified three trends in diaspora studies: first, studies of the slave trade that tend to focus on the causes, numbers, and impact on Africa and the Americas and Europe; second, Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic paradigm in which Africa is a silent presence and primacy is given to the Anglophone diaspora; third is the globalization paradigm with its historiographical implications for studies of transnationalization and for Africa. The issues center on the dispersal of Africans globally, the comparative processes of diaspora formation, and the connections between Africa and its diasporas (demographic, cultural (including religion and music), economic, political/ideological, intellectual/educational/artistic, and iconographic). Also important in diaspora studies are the relations between the old and new diasporas and their respective connections to Africa. Diaspora studies, I concluded, provide an analytical conduit for the globalization of Africa and the Africanization of globalization. It all took fifteen minutes.

In the discussion that followed, the chair of the panel, Alberto de Costa e Silva from the Brazilian Academy of Letters, called my presentation a brilliant overview, a word several members in the audience repeated to me after the session, including Paulo who I had met last Tuesday. The chair asked us to comment on each other’s papers before opening the session to the audience. I commented on Caley’s dichotomization of written and oral sources, which I found problematic, and on Ferriera’s paper I noted that the historiography of African studies in the U.S. is itself racialized.

The session ended with a brilliant video documentary of Afro-Brazilian slavery from the early days to abolition in 1888. Alencastro, who was sitting next to me, explained

some of the photographs, how slaves and freemen were distinguished by the wearing and not wearing of shoes. The commentary and the accompanying song gave the montage of photographs a harrowing evocation of the pain and pathos of slavery and the enduring humanity and agency of the enslaved.

After the session I lingered in the foyer outside the panel room waiting for Abena and Akosua who had suggested that we meet during the break and go to lunch together. In the meantime, several people stopped by and commented on how much they enjoyed my presentation. Among them were South Africa's former ambassador to Brazil and now Chief Director of the Latin America and Caribbean Division in the country's Department of Foreign Affairs, who expressed interest in consulting with me further and was happy to hear that I will be in Pretoria in early August.

When Abena and Akosua didn't turn up, I decided to go to one of the restaurants located on the first floor downstairs. There was a long line, and for a moment I toyed with the idea of going to another restaurant (we were given a list of restaurants in the vicinity of the convention center). In the end, I thought it was best to stay. I stood by a woman I had been briefly introduced to by either Molefi or James last night. We both recognized each other and exchanged greetings and reintroduced ourselves. She then introduced me to her friend in front of her. The woman's name was Alicia Sanabria. Alicia is originally from Cuba and educated in the United States including, as I later found out, at Cornell University. She knew Salah Hassan and Sandra Greene and we chatted about Africana studies at Cornell. Her friend, Alisa Sanders, is a freelance journalist who divides her time between Salvador and New York, spending two weeks in each city every month.

We sat together once we got our food in the cafeteria-style restaurant. It was somewhat of a relief to be able to speak English without staring, fumbling, and smiling with the embarrassment of ignorance, as I did with our Portuguese-speaking colleagues. Alicia talked about her experiences living in Salvador as a diasporan, of the challenges and possibilities. She noted how many African-American immigrants soon discover that Salvador is not the racial paradise they imagined, that the racial situation in the city harks back to the U.S. of the 1950s, and so some leave after a few years and return home. Alisa reflected on her search for belonging, the sense of alienation she has always felt in the U.S. and the trials and tribulations of exile. It was a wonderful, intellectually stimulating lunch. I told both that I would like to interview them formally for my project and they agreed. Besides us were two Afro-Brazilians who either kept quiet or moved in and out of conversation with either Alicia or Alisa in Portuguese. The man was a professor of chemistry; I didn't find out what the woman did.

After lunch, I went back to the 4th floor of the convention center where the sessions were being held. In one part, a book launch was being hosted by the Minister of Racial Equality, Matilde Ribeiro. There were so many panels to choose from, but all those I wanted to attend were at other venues in the city. I toyed with the idea of returning to the second part of the history panel where Toyin was presenting, but decided to go to a panel entitled, "Perspectives of and for the Youth in Africa and the Diaspora: The Role of new Cultural Expressions," which was being held at the Federal University of Bahia, Auditorium of the Old School of Medicine. I took a taxi and we drove across the city to the older part of town. I thought I was late, for we got there a little after 4:00 p.m., when the session was supposed to have started at 3:00 p.m. Fortunately, the session had not yet started. I decided to look at the museum within the building. This old bastion of racial science has been turned into an Afro-Brazilian museum and cultural center. There are

incredible wooden sculptures that fill the three walls of one room, as well as displays of other aspects of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in other rooms.

The panel started half-an-hour later. In the auditorium, I met and talked to Godwin, who was the rapporteur, and Ibrahim Abdulla, an old friend who used to teach at Illinois State University, who had presented in the morning. There were six presenters. Most of the participants in the auditorium were college students. The first to present was Denise Campbell who examined the plight of young black males in Toronto and their struggles against racism and violence through artistic creations. She was followed by Helder Malauene from Mozambique who discussed the work of his Foundation for Community Development and the 2050 vision, developed by youth from eastern and southern Africa, sponsored by the Foundation. João Jorge Rodriques of the famous musical and cultural group *Oludum* followed. He spoke passionately about *Oludum*'s struggles for cultural and political emancipation for black youths and the Afro-Brazilian community in general.

I was curious about Michael Eric Dyson's presentation. I had heard that he is a fascinating performer, combining the theatrics of a preacher and a rapper, and the cadences of a scholar. He did not disappoint. He combined a sober analysis of the situations of black youth in American inner cities with exhortations to youth to be more involved in struggles for racial equality and justice, as well as a critical celebration of hip hop. He rapped the lines of some famous rappers and rap songs. The student audience loved it and they rapped along with him and yelled when he mentioned the names of their favorite rappers and groups—Tupac, Biggie Smalls, Snoop Dogg, Public Enemy, Ice Cube, LL Cool J, Mos Def, and so on. While attacking the misogyny of some rappers and the crass materialism and hedonism of their messages, he praised the progressive cultural and political potential of the militant rappers who need to be embraced and engaged by the older generation and defended against middle-age and middle-class contempt and condemnation. The students gave him a standing ovation.

I initially felt sorry for the last speaker, Toni Garrido coming after such a performance. But Toni, a singer, songwriter and actor, more than held his own. Probably in his late thirties, and wearing short locks, he looked every inch an entertainer. But it soon became clear he had a sharp mind to match. He brilliantly analyzed the challenges facing Afro-Brazilian artists and their different strategies to overcome them. He noted that some succeed while others are swallowed by the entertainment industry with its mindless commercialization, and they become increasingly alienated from the concerns and interests of their black audience and supporters. He was given thunderous applause. But more was to come.

The question and answer session was an outstanding display of passionate, youthful political discourse combined with intellectual rigor, cultural sophistication, and the moral rage only youth are capable of. One after another, they challenged and attacked their elders—who at this moment were represented by João and Toni—demanding answers, accountability and responsibility for the black struggle. João and Toni both mounted vigorous defenses of their personal and generational struggles, and challenged the youth in turn to play their part, to build on the struggles of the past that they were so vehemently attacking. Dyson intervened, expressing admiration and astonishment at the high level of debate, the intensity of the rage, the intelligence of its expression, the urgency and gravity of the issues. He couldn't imagine such discourse in the U.S. among artists and their audience or in his seminars at one of the country's leading Ivy League schools. I couldn't agree with him more.

I felt immensely proud of the students, as well as of Toni and João; immensely hopeful for Brazil's future, that this generation will not allow the indignities of the past to continue,

the racist oppression and exploitation of their parents and forbearers to persist. If their demands are not met, I said to Ibrahim and Godwin, Brazil is headed for a social convulsion that will overshadow the American civil rights movement, let alone the recent conflagration in France. The angry youth represent the awakening of the black masses from the nightmare of Brazil's deeply entrenched racism. At the end of the session, I approached one of the students who had been given a standing ovation for her powerful intervention to ask if I could meet with her and some of her friends and colleagues for an interview for my project. She agreed and gave me a number I could contact her. The session lasted four-and-a-half hours.

We raved about the session as we returned to our respective hotels. It felt like we were coming from a religious revival meeting, not an academic conference. I got to my hotel around 9:30 p.m. I was the last to be dropped off; the others, including Dyson and Campbell, were staying at other hotels. But we agreed to go to the concert at the municipal arena downtown.

At dinner I met Gibril, Chinua, and Margaret (I didn't get her last name), a friend of Chinua and a former official at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and now with the UN in New York. I told them about the concert later tonight and they agreed to go. At 10:30 p.m., we went to the lobby to wait for Godwin, Helder, Denise and others from the nearby Blue Tree Hotel. The concert, as teenagers would say, was a blast. We met Julio Tavares, the moderator of the youth panel, who led us, together with his party, to the middle of the huge concert where we danced with the wild abandon of new initiates. Several of Afro-Brazil's top singers, including Toni Garrido, played. It was an intoxicating mixture of samba, hip hop, and other genres of Afro-Brazilian music whose names I didn't know but whose ecstatic rhythms and electric vocals I followed with my feet, arms, and swaying hips. When I got back to my hotel room a little after 1:00 a.m., the music was still ringing in my ears.

July 14, 2006

The CIAD II Conference ended with political drama. As had become routine over the past two days, the conference did not start on time. It started well after the scheduled 10:00 a.m. The morning session was devoted to a series of speeches for the third and final plenary on "The Need for a Political Pact Between Africa and the Diaspora for Peace, Democracy and Development." Incongruously, it was moderated by a delegate from the International Organization of the Francophonie, a French woman, Christine Desouches. The speeches, though were less bland and predictable than during the plenary of the presidents and prime ministers.

The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai, was the first to speak. She delivered a short, powerful speech on the indivisible connections between peace and environmentalism, noting that the maldistribution of resources was a major source of conflict, so that environmental protection and justice, equitable access to resources, combined with good, participatory governance, are indispensable for sustainable development and human progress.

Gilberto Gil, the Brazilian Minister of Culture, delivered another powerful address paying tribute to the struggles of the black movement for freedom in Brazil and the Pan-Africanist

movement in Africa and proclaimed Brazil's commitment to a new pact with Africa for Africa's and Brazil's development. He called for the establishment of networks of teaching, research, and cultural exchanges among writers, producers, musicians, and artists, and the implementation of a worldwide African diasporic network that intervenes in global forums. A new pact was needed among the several countries of Africa and the diaspora.

Continuing on the theme of a new political pact, Frene Ginwala urged that the pact between Africa and the diaspora must be based on the common values of peace, democracy, and development; it must recognize both the commonalities and particularities of experiences. Peace can only be ensured with justice and human security, which entails the provision of human rights, respect for diversity, and the protection of people, not leaders. International resources must be mobilized for peace and to end conflicts and there should be no double standards among nations, with one set of standards for the strong and another for the weak. As for democracy, it means more than elections, it is a process involving the continuous participation of citizens in which civil society and social movements are actively involved. She poked fun at the U.S. 2000 elections. Intellectuals need to be part of the democratic process as well as of the pact, they must be actively engaged and not act as ivory tower commentators. In turn, governments need to recognize the important role of intellectuals and make space for them. The proposed pact should not be exclusive. We need to shape global agendas, the architecture of the global system, she stressed. She concluded that we need to talk about the poor and marginalized everywhere, support multilateralism and against unilateralism and speak out against invasions, including the recent one in Palestine, and condemn state acts of terrorism directed at civilians. She received excited applause, no doubt for her veiled jabs at the United States and Israel.

The next two speakers should have kept their thoughts to themselves. The former president of Cape Verde, Antonio Mascarenhas Monteiro shared his personal recollections of Brazil in his youth, commended the objectives of peace, democracy, and development, and lamented the continuing conflicts and poor social conditions in Africa and noted that while some countries had made considerable advances, many more were unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The African diasporas could help by trying to influence specific governments in transferring knowledge and investments, and by establishing continuous dialogue.

The Royal Counselor from Morocco, André Azoulay, talked as if Morocco were not a part of Africa by referring to the town of Ginawa and its festivals as the face of the real Africa in Morocco, an example of Africa's legendary openness to universality. Later he emphasized Morocco's role in Africa's liberation struggles, recalling the role of the Casablanca Conference, as well as Africa's immense contribution to philosophy, science, and the arts. He noted that Africa is both African and Arab in nature, and Morocco is a country of cultural synthesis, which has been open to all forms of culture and spirituality. For example, Morocco welcomed Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. He regretted the rise of retrogressive forces, the onslaught of spiritual and cultural fragmentation in a world ostensibly undergoing globalization, but which was actually divided between the globalists and the globalized. Morocco, he declared, wants to be a full partner in the proposed new pact.

The President of the Supreme Court of Benin, Conceptia Ouinsou, lamented that up until now, the diaspora has not been taken into account by African governments at continental and national levels. This was now changing as realization has grown that the diaspora, a historical and contemporary phenomenon, is essential for Africa's development

in this era of globalization and new information and communication technologies. It can assist in the fight against poverty, in resolving conflicts. As a motor of Africa's transformation, the diaspora must be allowed to participate in African affairs. The question of travel visas for the diaspora needs to be revisited in this context. The audience gave her polite applause.

The auditorium came back alive when two Afro-Brazilian musicians were asked to speak, to counterbalance, Gilberto Gil announced, the honor given to Stevie Wonder. The young man dressed in a cap was a member of a hip hop group and he noted that the city of Salvador has been mobilized and energized by the conference. The much older female singer, who had played at the concert last night, was as powerful and eloquent as Stevie Wonder. She noted that changes in the country enabled the convening of CIAD II in Salvador. She saluted the black movement, condemned the suffering and challenges facing black people in the world, and celebrated the rise of black officials at the highest levels of government—including cabinet ministers for the first time in Brazilian history—and the need for solidarity and more far-reaching interventions to promote the dignity, rights, and status of Afro-Brazilians. The audience rose to its feet, fired by her raspy and jazzy voice. It was a prelude to the commotion that was to come shortly.

It was when Edna Maria Santos Roland was speaking that the demonstrations occurred. Roland is coordinator of the monitoring group designated to follow the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action. She recounted the context in which the Durban Conference was held, the U.S. and Israeli boycotts, and how discussion of slavery and the slave trade and reparations and the Middle East conflict dominated the conference. She noted that soon after the conference were the September 11 attacks that reflected rising tensions in the world.

Suddenly, a group of demonstrators burst into the staid auditorium with banners, chanting for quotas and against racism. It was electric. We all stood up and many in the audience—mostly students—joined the demonstrators in ecstatic chants or by clapping their hands as they made their way to the dais to the apparent dismay of some of the officials. But I saw Roland waiving in support. Two students went on the dais and read the manifesto, copies of which were later circulated. I recognized the female student from the session yesterday afternoon. The manifesto, or motion of support, read in part:

We, representatives and intellectuals of Africa and the diaspora, gathered at the CIAD II Conference of Intellectuals from Africa and the Diaspora, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, taking place from the 12th to 15th of July 2006, we consider that the racial inequality in Brazil has deep historical roots and this reality will not be modified significantly without the application of specific public policies.... Considering that Brazil has the second biggest black population on the planet, and must repair the asymmetries provoked by policies the Brazilian government promoted during the first republic, which granted special benefits to stimulate European immigrants to come to Brazil, and at the same time it denied the same benefits to Brazilian afro-descendants....

Considering that the Brazilian system of superior education is one of the most exclusive of the world. The average percentage of black professors in Brazilian public universities does not reach 1% when blacks represent 45.6% of the Brazilian population.... We consider that affirmative action, based in the positive discrimination toward those injured by historical process, is the legal means for repairing the degrading effects of racism.

We support, therefore, the National Day of Mobilization in Defense of Quotas (18 of August), and that the Brazilian Congress approve, with maximum urgency, the Law of Quotas (PL 73/1999) and the Statute of Racial Equality (PL 3, 198/2000).

Then they broke into song, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica*, the national anthem of the African liberation movement in Southern Africa. The crowd joined and I saw a few Africans in the audience choke up with emotion, and one or two wipe tears from their eyes. It finally brought home to the African participants, as nothing else could, the gravity of the racial situation in Brazil; of the explosive tensions they had so far been shielded from in the opulent surroundings of the convention center and their hotels, all of which were located in the affluent and whiter districts of Salvador, far from the black, relatively impoverished masses; of the deep racial inequalities that make a mockery of Brazil's official—and white—professions of racial democracy and Third World solidarity. For that reason, I felt immensely proud of the demonstrators, grateful for their courage, for opening the eyes of the African delegates, for forcing us to offer support and endorse the struggles of our people in this country of vast potential, where the largest African diaspora resides and calls home.

The demonstrators left the hall chanting, singing, and clapping, and many of us in the audience followed them. The speeches continued, but in effect, the conference was over, it had ended on a very high note.

I went to lunch with Julio Tavares, who I had asked to lunch yesterday after the session on youth cultures. We had lunch at his hotel, the Blue. We were joined by Takwiyya and Denise. Ibrahim and Abebe sat on an adjacent table and we all told them about the demonstrations that they had missed. It was a great lunch, full of rich intellectual conversations and lots of laughter. Julio is a hoot; a man of deep intellectual passion and insight who is given easily to laughter. He talked about the challenges facing Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and about his own work. He noted that exclusions of Afro-Brazilians are most manifest in medicine, engineering, law, and the information technology fields. He originally trained in history and got his PhD in Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. His work centers on communication, memory, and cognition in the African diaspora. His PhD was on the role of language as a process of symbolization, the ways in which metaphors and metonyms have been deployed in diaspora societies to construct identities and build resistance in everyday life. He compared the idea of *cool* in the U.S. African-American society, culture and imagination and the idea of *ginga* in Brazil. He studied and spent a year in a New York City neighborhood, as well as the neighborhood of Mengueira in Rio.

Julio is intrigued by the processes of fusion of African-American coolness with local symbolization as represented for example in Afro-Brazilian hip hop. These intersections are part of the global-local nexus evident in black representation throughout the diaspora, he said. I mentioned that I would be interested in organizing a conference on affirmative action in Brazil, the U.S., and South Africa as a way of promoting diasporic intellectual discourse that was more intensive and productive than is possible at large conferences such as CIAD II. He thought it was a great idea and suggested the inclusion of India where affirmative action debates are rife. I thought this would also be a way of bringing in the African diaspora in Asia. He mentioned that he was the chief local organizer of the diaspora conference in Rio last October, to which many people from the U.S. came. When we returned to the convention center for the closing session of CIAD II, I introduced Julio to Ebrima and they exchanged contact information, and later I introduced him to Adebayo

as well. He is a great contact for CODESRIA and all of us seriously interested in working with our Brazilian colleagues.

The afternoon session was taken up by the rapporteurs presenting their reports on their respective sessions. They were given seven to ten minutes each, but several went over, some to almost double the allowed time. Boubacar Barry seemed less interested in summarizing the two history sessions, one of which I had participated in, than in making his own presentation. Shadrack Gutto and Godwin Murunga adhered faithfully to their mandates and provided good summaries. Shadrack gave me a copy of his and Godwin later e-mailed me his. I didn't listen to the rest. It was more fun talking to people and taking pictures in the foyer.

The *Salvador Declaration* was circulated in the course of the rapporteurs' summaries. It was while in the foyer that I noticed some commotion over the draft declaration orchestrated by the Senegalese foreign minister who objected to what I considered a rather innocuous proposal that the "African Union should establish a steering committee of intellectuals to assist the Commission of the African Union in the preparation of CIAD III." Apparently, a permanent mechanism was created, located in Dakar, after CIAD I, which I wasn't aware of. It was the arrogant manner in which he spoke, including threatening to derail the passage of the declaration, which I found repulsive. The official Senegalese delegation likes to play above its weight. His countryman, Aliounne Tine, who wears his graying afro as if the seventies had never ended, tried to reason with him, as did Adebayo. In the meantime, and this time more legitimately, the Brazilians were seeking inclusion of support for a clause on affirmative action and reparations.

The closing session, in which the presentation of the *Salvador Declaration* was to be made, started long after its scheduled time as the two groups went back and forth with the co-chairs of CIAD, Gil and Ginwala. In the end—almost 8:00 p.m.—Ginwala called the assembly to silence and noted two revisions had been made, first to accommodate the Senegalese government—it was not said in what way—and second, to include a clause supporting affirmative action and reparations in Brazil, which was greeted by the Brazilians and many in the audience with screams of approval. And so CIAD II ended, befittingly in recognition of the struggles and demands of Africa's largest diaspora. It was an immensely gratifying moment, although the academic in me was cynical about its implementation.

Shadrack and I left together. He mentioned that Abena and Akosua wanted us to call them when we returned to the hotel. The two sisters had rooms at the Pestana and another hotel in Pelourinho. They had ordered some snacks and we ate while Akosua regaled us with stories of the effort it took to bring Stevie Wonder to CIAD II on the opening day. She is a fantastic storyteller. I recall reading her gripping first novel, *The Seasons of Beento Blackbird*, which she gave me when we met at a conference on African writers at Rutgers University in April 2005. Abena adores her younger sister, for she listens to her with the sweetest of smiles and pride written all over her face. There is no question that the feelings for Akosua are reciprocal. We decided to go and listen to music. Akosua had a car and a driver—the privileges of knowing and coming with Stevie Wonder, we teased her.

We were first driven to a club that seemed full of young white yuppies or children of the Salvadoran white elite. Akosua remarked we hadn't come all the way to be with spoiled white kids. We looked for a more racially friendly club, but couldn't find one. We ended up at a less ostentatious club where a live band was playing. But even here, there were

hardly any blacks, except for one woman waiter and one musician. We resigned ourselves and did more talking than listening to music. Part of the conversation focused on white-black romantic relationships; that while individuals have a right to choose and marry whoever they like, something is fundamentally wrong for those blacks who only date or marry whites because that is more about self-hatred than love. From the club we drove to Pelourinho, the predominantly black part of town where their other hotel room is located. It is a converted Catholic nunnery with beautifully decorated corridors, large grounds in the middle, and lovely sitting places all along the corridors. We sat outside the restaurant and were served a light meal of smoked salmon and a freshly made strawberry shake. Abena and Shadrack enjoyed their wine. Akosua drinks little, mixing her sips of wine with fruit juice.

By the time we left, it was after 3:00 a.m. The driver seemed unperturbed when he drove Shadrack and me back to our hotel. A couple of times as we sat chatting, the hotel's food and beverage manager came and talked to us at length about his love for his job. He clearly was enchanted by the Busia sisters, their apparent joy of life and infectious laugh. Shadrack, too, raved about how wonderful they were as we were being driven to the hotel. He had met them at Johannesburg International Airport en route to the CIAD II Conference. He was impressed by their intelligence, artistic souls, and charm. I loved the evening; I couldn't recall the last time I had stayed up so late club hopping!

July 15, 2006

I had to wake up after barely three hours of sleep for an interview with Abdias do Nascimento that Kofi had arranged for us. Kofi had suggested that we meet during breakfast and conduct the interview with Nascimento after he had his breakfast. I contacted Veronica last night to ask her to come to the hotel at 8:30 a.m. for the interview, in case Elisa had other things to do to translate.

I went to the 23rd floor of the hotel where there is another restaurant that only serves breakfast. From there you can see spectacular views of the city, on one side the expanding skyline of Salvador, on the other, the favelas competing with high-rises for space and visibility. When I got there, the Nascimentos were not yet in the restaurant; Kofi was sitting with Paulin Houtondji the great Béninois philosopher. We talked briefly then I went downstairs to wait for Veronica in case she went to the wrong restaurant on the 1st floor. When Veronica and I returned to the 23rd floor, Kofi and Paulin had left. We decided to have breakfast and wait. A quarter of an hour later the Nascimentos came into the restaurant—Elisa pushing her husband's wheelchair, followed by their son and a young white woman. I discreetly talked to Elisa about the interview and she confirmed it with Abdias, after which I called Kofi, who came up.

It was decided that we conduct the interview in their suite, for the restaurant was rather noisy. Besides people talking, there was music playing in the background. There was an Afro-Brazilian musician with his guitar, singing the smoothest of music fit for breakfast. We followed the Nascimentos to their suite after giving them a decent interval to get ready. They welcomed us most warmly. Abdias had not changed from his housecoat, beneath which he wore a white undershirt. Elisa wore a silky, light green top and striped pants.

She sat next to Abdias, who was in his wheelchair, while Kofi sat on one sofa and Veronica and I shared the big sofa. I briefly explained my research project and how privileged I felt to be able to talk to him, a man, who in American terms, combined Du Bois, King, and Malcolm X. He chuckled, saying I was praising him too much. He agreed to the taping of the interview.

As an icon of both the black movement in Brazil and the Pan-Africanist movement, the discussion was insightful and moving. Elisa jumped in and even corrected or disagreed with him. It was most endearing to watch; in those few moments, they gave us a glimpse that this was a marriage of minds, that she is a formidable intellectual and scholar of Brazil in her own right. Elisa came in and out of the conversation as she answered endless phone calls. Whenever she came back she would interpret for Abdias, and at other times, Veronica would do it. Veronica was clearly overwhelmed; she said she hadn't slept well, anxiously anticipating this interview.

Kofi and I began by thanking the great man for agreeing to meet with us. He nodded in acknowledgement. We briefed him on the last day of the convention and the controversies over the final declaration. Abdias observed that governments have always tried to manipulate Pan-Africanism for their own purposes. I noted that one of the amendments that excited the audience concerned affirmative action and quotas. How about reparations, Abdias asked? He decried that some African presidents seem opposed to discussing reparations. I informed him that the issue of reparations was included. It was, good, he beamed. When I informed him that I was originally from Malawi, Abdias lit up. He said they have a bowl, a very beautiful, carved wooden bowl, which he bought in Burkina Faso, but it's from Malawi. I don't know whether he meant Mali.

He began by noting that the Pan-Africanist movement has undergone many changes and is currently in a different, quite challenging and potentially constructive moment. In the past, Pan-Africanism was directed by towering figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, who was an activist and an intellectual. Then it fell into the hands of political figures, heads of states and government leaders who used their power in demagogic ways to destroy and bury the movement. He recalled the 6th Pan-African Congress in Tanzania in 1974, when he risked his reputation by taking positions that seemed opposed to those of government leaders. Those sad times when the Pan-Africanist movement was stuck in the hands of particular heads of state has passed. Since that Congress, there has been a new sense of openness in the Pan-Africanist movement. Pan-Africanist militants need to make sure they hold on to the new momentum. They must ensure the movement doesn't fall in the hands of the wrong leaders again. So this is a crucial moment, a constructive moment.

As for the black movement here in Brazil, it is in a critical time as well. It must build on the successes the movement has achieved so far. It is now in a position to impose its issues on the government. It must be able to articulate its demands effectively and require concrete actions from the government. He sought to put the black movement in the wider historical context of Brazil. The country is 500 years old, he said. However, in only three of these years has there been a representative of the working class in office. At that point, Elisa intervened to insist the changes cannot be attributed to the current government. The black movement was already opening new spaces before Lula came in, she said. The 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism played an important role in forcing the then-Brazilian government to reorient its policies and to be mindful of its international reputation. The black movement strategically used the preparatory conference to press its demands. In 2001, the government of President Cardoso had

already begun to implement affirmative action policies in some of the ministries. The Lula government was not yet in power. Change was in the offing because of the political interventions of the black movement in civil society. It may not have gone as far as it would now with Lula. But that political space had been created by the black movement before Lula. Lula's political party contributed to that but it wasn't the only political force that facilitated that change. In fact, Abdias' political party, the Democratic Labor Party, and Governor Leonel Brizola, were also very important political forces in bringing about that change.

She doesn't agree with me, Abdias said fondly. I think that's fine, since I agree with her. I'm not saying that it was only President Lula, he resumed. I'm saying that he's a key figure at this time, in this moment. Before we had President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who intellectually speaking, was much more advanced, was in appearance very progressive and democratic, who seemed to support everything African, wanted to build relations with Africa, externally exhibited an intellectual open-mindedness, but in the end, he really didn't do much. Elisa jumped in again to register her divergent view. She agreed with Abdias that Cardoso "botched the whole process." Her point, however, was that it was not Cardoso who was key, it was the presence of the black movement and its political force that forced him to create an Inter-Ministerial working group for redressing black grievances. Abdias added that this group didn't really do anything besides holding seminars all over Brazil on the question of affirmative action. They held seminars where only the whites, enemies of the black people, had voice, he said ruefully.

But Abdias, you were there, Elisa interjected. I had to be there to protest, he responded. The black movement was there, and from then on, they had to open up spaces, she reiterated. I don't think that it's a matter of the benevolence of one or another president. I think it's a matter of the organized political force. I agree that it's not about the president only, Abdias concurred, but the president has fundamental importance. Cardoso would have never made the declaration that Brazil is an African country. That's because he wouldn't have made such a declaration coming from the aristocratic, European elite. That is something very serious, grave, for them.

Elisa elaborated on the two popular political and cultural statements. One says that Brazil has its heel in the kitchen, and the other says Brazil is an African country. Clearly, they are emblematic statements that create an ambiance for the work that is being done by black activists to thrive or not to thrive, to go forward or not to go forward. And of course, it is true that President Lula has created a special secretariat for policies for the promotion of racial equality, so clearly yes he has gone much farther than Cardoso.

I am not a spokesperson for Cardoso, she declared, my point is that there was a process going on and that process has a great deal to do with the international context. Because if it were not for the third anti-racism conference in Durban, Cardoso's government would not have done what it did.

Kofi asked Abdias to reconcile his views on the role of governments in Pan-Africanism. He noted that he gave a lot of credit to Lula, while earlier he said one of the factors that weakened the Pan-African movement was that it fell too much in the hands of governments. How do we put those two statements together, especially when you consider what happened to the Pan-African movement in Africa following the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah?

When I say that the government of Lula is important, Abdias responded, I'm not saying that Lula is stupid or foolish. He's a politician who has to naturally observe the national

and international stance. He can't just come here and pull out the Pan-Africanist flag. He can't say let's go to Africa. Lula has no pretensions of being a Pan-African leader. It appeared to me, I observed, that international conferences have been quite critical in reinforcing the black movement's demands in Brazil.

In that context, I asked what role did he think African governments have played, or could play, in further advancing the black movement's agenda? Of course, African governments can play an important role, he replied. They need to stimulate exchanges with the diaspora, promoting other initiatives beyond the educational, which can help the black movement. Since black people here don't have economic or industrial power to be able to make links with Africa directly, it's important for African states to undertake initiatives that directly benefit the black community, to assist the black movement in gaining power here. Black people don't have money to house, feed and clothe themselves, so African governments could have a role in supporting Afro-Brazilian organizations.

CIAD II hopefully can help advance this agenda, although he doesn't see anything concrete yet. The fact that we are having these conversations was a beginning, important first steps. Elisa added that the conference created a forum for the students to gain greater visibility for their demands.

One of the most remarkable things, I chimed in, was that a lot of Africans were shocked to realize that there were all these undercurrents of rage in the black community. And when the students started to sing *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, they finally seemed to get it. It was powerful language, Abdias agreed. Their emotions came through; they weren't just saying *Reparations Now* without a foundation. The rage, the need for change, is tangible. They were expressing their lived realities. Understanding of these realities among Africans can't come through the heads of states, but in contact with ordinary people. The truth of the matter is that African leaders and diplomats in Brazil live apart; they are distanced from the realities of the ordinary people. Like their Brazilian counterparts, their children are sequestered in the best private schools. They don't have any direct contact with the people who are in despair, in need. They don't understand the incredible anxieties of the ordinary people, Elisa repeated.

This is what Abdias was saying in his open letter before the conference, she said. He wanted to be the voice of those who were not there, the voice of those who invaded the plenary. Kofi wanted to move away for a moment from focusing on governments to the ordinary people. In a way, I know this will take us to the work you did earlier, he said looking at Abdias. How many people in Brazil recognize themselves as Afro-descendants?, he asked. Now people are running to become Afro-descendants, Abdias chuckled, because of affirmative action. They want to access strategic resources, I jumped in.

Kofi noted that he was taken aback when he learned yesterday following the protests that although the African population in Brazil is officially nearly half, only about 2% are represented in higher education. Elisa responded by saying little has indeed changed in Brazil. What has changed, the great difference in her mind, and what Abdias actually wrote in an article on the subject, is that we now have the question out in public debate, and there are still many reactionary forces that are very much against the idea of affirmative action; launching manifestos against it. Just last week some people handed the President of the Parliament a declaration petitioning against affirmative action policies. The person leading this manifesto is a researcher who specializes in Afro-Brazilian culture. So there is still a great deal of resistance. What is important is that the question of racism is out

in the open; it is being debated and the black movement has scored new victories and carved for itself a piece of the political ground.

As we came to the end, Kofi said he couldn't resist asking one last question. He has known Abdias through his work as an artist and a cultural activist. In the current context, with emphasis on the political, what role did he see for the area of culture and the arts in redefining these spaces? Well to begin, Abdias stated, I have to disagree with the divisions you are trying to make. There are no divisions between art, politics, history, and culture. When I'm painting, I am doing political work, when I'm on the podiums of the National Congress, I am making poetry. I am always intertwined. As I am speaking with you here, I am also doing political work. I felt like clapping. On that note, thank you, I said with deep appreciation.

Kofi had the last word. He reminded the great man that next year is the 50th Anniversary of Ghana's Independence. If we are able to persuade our government to bring you back to Ghana, will you come?, he asked. That will be the crowning of my life, Abdias smiled, perhaps reflecting on a long life of struggle for his people across the Atlantic, and some of its achievements represented by Ghana's independence half a century ago and the advances made by the black movement in his native Brazil.

Abdias had another interviewer waiting for him. It was Alisa. We ran into her at the door as we left. We were both surprised. She said after the interview she was going to the market to show Wangari Maathai and her party around the old town. I asked if we could join them. Kofi had asked if I could ask Veronica to show him around, and Veronica agreed, but I thought the new arrangement was better, for I would have felt obliged to pay Veronica her hourly research assistance rate had she gone with Kofi.

Half an hour later, Alisa was done and she found me and Kofi waiting for her. We took a taxi to the *mercato*. Kofi seemed, in his quiet way, pleased with the opportunity to see a part of Salvador he had not seen during the conference, the heavy black presence everywhere we went. He later remarked that it was a profound experience; the reality of black Brazil finally hit him. At the *mercato*, a crafts market very much like such markets across the continent, we moved from stall to stall bargaining with the vendors. I hadn't planned on buying anything but I was caught in the spirit and ended up purchasing three short-sleeved shirts. Kofi bought stuff for his wife and two daughters and helped himself to several shirts. The vendors were friendly, not too aggressive in pushing their wares, and eager to talk to us when they discovered we were Africans who had come for the CIAD II Conference.

Kofi remarked that it was as if the whole town had been mobilized for CIAD II to welcome the foreign conference participants. One young man, upon hearing that Kofi was from Ghana, raised three fingers in mock triumph, referring to the three goals Brazil had scored against Ghana in the recent World Cup and we all burst out laughing and hugged the young man. Several vendors wanted their pictures taken with us. We walked around the *mercato*, the two of us having left Alisa with Wangari Maathai and her party, whom we met shortly after arriving in the *mercato*. We agreed to meet outside the *mercato* at a set time, which we did. Wangari was accompanied by her daughter, Wanjira, who is the Executive Director of the Greenbelt Movement that her mother founded, and for which she received the 2000 Nobel Peace Prize. She was accompanied by a white man whose name and status was not clear; as well as Binti, the partner of my friend Willie Mutunga, a leading Kenyan lawyer and human rights activist; and a young activist from Trinidad whose name I can't remember. We took the elevator from across the *mercato* to the other side of the old town, where Alisa led us on a tour.

I had already been to many parts of the places we visited, but it was fun watching the others soak in the sights, sounds, and roadside food smells of black Salvador. In one of the squares, we viewed giant black-and-white photos of prominent Afro-Brazilians from all walks of life and watched a capoeira dance performance. Wangari was fascinated by the old churches and tried to get into a couple of them. On one occasion, as the two of us watched alone, I brought up the subject of Africa's responsibility to the diaspora, which requires, at the very least, that we know our diasporas and support their struggles. I suggested that as she talks to her colleagues in political office across the continent and as chair of the AU's Social, Economic, and Cultural Council, she should impress upon them the need to teach about African diaspora histories, much in the same way that Brazil has recently decided to teach African histories in schools. Also, we need to develop exchange programs—cultural, educational, and social—especially for young people. She commented on how surprised she was to see so many black people even on this short tour, as she had once been surprised when she first went to the United States. Incredibly, several people on the street recognized her as the Noble Prize winner and wanted to take pictures with her! Kofi attributed this to the power of television and black solidarity; the yearning black people have to share in each other's success.

After walking around the old town, it became clear that Wangari was tired, so she and her daughter, and the white man took a taxi back to their hotel. The five of us, Kofi and I and the three women, decided to find a restaurant to eat. Alisa took us to a popular eatery in the neighborhood where local activists apparently hang out—*Restaurante Alaíde do Feijão*. The couple who owns it were extremely gracious; besides serving us wonderful dishes, they took pictures with us and gave me a T-shirt bearing the colors and logo of their restaurant. The restaurant can barely seat twenty people, but it is clearly a popular spot, for when we were there people kept coming in and out, some just dropped in to say hello. The walls are filled with pictures of the owners posing with customers. We had fish, chicken, roasted beef, oxtail, rice, and the ever present beans, appropriately downed with a local beverage that tastes like Mountain Dew but is apparently made out of a root plant from the Amazon. Kofi insisted on beer, which he nursed with pleasure.

After lunch, we continued walking around and Kofi looked for a jewelry store. By then it was getting rather late and I had an appointment at 6:00 p.m. to go to an Ilê Aiyê performance where I was scheduled to talk to one of its founders, a female professor from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). We left the three women behind and returned to the hotel. By then it was around 5:30 p.m. I waited for Veronica, but by 6:30 p.m., she had not turned up or called. Then I got a call from Abena who asked me to join her and her sister to go to an open air concert in the old town. I took a taxi to their hotel, where their driver was now accompanied by a woman who could speak English and who had accompanied them shopping during the afternoon. She was white.

When we got to the square, the same one we had visited last Wednesday, she immediately warned me about wearing my gold watch, necklace, and bracelet. I looked at her with incredulity. I recalled Allesandra's similar warning in Rio. Some of these privileged white people are so scared of black people, I thought to myself, and in order to justify their fears they try to criminalize them.

I took an immediate dislike to her. The square was sparsely occupied compared to last Wednesday because it was raining. We bought two large umbrellas, but after a while, we gave up the effort and decided to leave. At that point, we went to the place where the Ilê

Aiyê ceremony was being held that I had been invited to earlier. When Akosua asked, our white friend said she had never been in that neighborhood. It was in one of the favelas.

The ceremony was held in a large hall. We found a graduation celebration in session as we arrived, students from the local vocational school. They had their artifacts—dress makers, technologists, culinary and aesthetic products—on display on the second floor, which overlooks the hall downstairs. We were served delicious chicken cooked in coconut water and rice. The director of the center welcomed us very warmly and was at pains to ensure that we were well taken care of. Entrance fees were waived and we were given arm bands to the exclusive third floor where there was more food—shrimp and a whole assortment of local delicacies, as well as ample drinks. From the balcony we watched the crowd on the first floor and the bands playing a wide range of music, all of which was either vaguely or quite familiar—some of it sounded like rhumba, whose rhythmic beats left all of us on the third floor shaking in our toes; some even danced, as did many on the first floor. We discovered around midnight that the Ilê Aiyê performance would not start until another two hours or so. Abena and Akosua had a 7:00 a.m. flight and Abena looked tired; so was I, from the late hours last night. We decided to leave.

The driver and our white friend who had stood out at the center dropped Abena and Akosua off at their hotel and took me to mine. Before parting, Abena and Akosua each hugged me and we all said what a wonderful time we had had at the conference and these past two nights. I joked that our next rendezvous should be in Accra at the house Akosua is building. She gave me a throaty laugh nodding in agreement. On the way to my hotel our white friend tried to make conversation; I tried hard to be polite. I was glad when they dropped me off. I eagerly anticipated long uninterrupted sleep to make up for the past few nights of hyperactivity due to the conference. I was looking forward to a lazy Sunday. My hopes were dashed as soon as I got to the hotel. There was a phone call from Veronica apologizing for the cancellation of the Ilê Aiyê interview because the woman I was supposed to interview had taken ill. She said we had a morning interview with Taynar's father-in-law. I felt like cursing—there goes my sleep, I thought, but I was impressed at how seriously Taynar was taking her assistance for my research.

July 16, 2006

Veronica came to pick me up at a little after 9:00 for our 9:30 a.m. interview with Taynar's father-in-law, Professor Kabengele Munanga. It was raining so we decided to go by taxi to Kabengele's hotel, which was within walking distance. A short man with salt-and-pepper hair, he welcomed us in the room next to the reception area. Veronica briefly introduced me to him and I expressed my regret for our inability to meet earlier in the week and my gratitude for today's meeting, which was not entirely true, but it seemed the right thing to say.

Kabengele is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and has lived in Brazil for 31 years. He first came as a graduate student, fleeing from Belgium to escape the long arm of Mobutu's dictatorship. Between 1979 and 1980, he was at the Federal University of Rio Grande of the North. Since 1980, he has been at the University of São Paulo where he is Professor of Anthropology. He works on racial and ethnic interactions in Brazil. He is the author of 80 publications including two books. He has supervised twenty PhDs and six MAs, all of them on issues of racial and inter-ethnic relations. More

recently, he has started working on affirmative action and trying to challenge the arguments of the anti-affirmative action advocates.

Much of the discussion focused on relations between Africans and Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, changes in racial relations in Brazil, and the factors behind those changes. On the first issue, he observed that the relations are generally good, characterized by mutual curiosity, sometimes admiration, and they are very emotional. Irrespective of where one is from in Africa, one feels this closeness to Afro-Brazilians who are anxious about their roots. But Afro-Brazilian perceptions are not based on, or do not reflect, the reality of Africa, so in a sense there is no shared knowledge between them and Africans. When I asked about the profile of the African immigrants in Brazil, he noted that it was very hard to get such information. When he first arrived in 1975, the few Africans in São Paulo were all students, graduates students. There were also, of course, diplomats from Africa in Brasília. Unfamiliar with blacks driving expensive cars and wearing suits, many Brazilians often mistook them for drivers! Yet, when Africans dressed in their national dress people would say to them that Carnival hadn't started!

The number of Africans coming to Brazil increased following the liberation of Angola and Mozambique, as more students came, many on scholarships. From then on, a number of agreements have been signed between Brazil and several African governments, which have increased the number of African students in Brazilian universities. In the early 1970s, there was a wave of Nigerians who came as merchants, and every African coming to or living in Brazil was often assumed to be Nigerian. As the number of Angolans increased, including many who came as refugees, immigrants were assumed Angolan. Immigrants from the DRC are concentrated in São Paulo. There have been several other waves over the last two-and-a-half decades, most recently refugees and stowaways who are generally embraced by the Brazilian government. Now the size of the African immigrant community is quite large; it is still dominated by students who become professionals once they have completed their studies. In comparison to Europe, however, the African immigrant population in Brazil is still rather small. Many of the refugees are often assisted by Catholic charities. No one has actually done research on African immigration patterns to Brazil, although that can be done by looking at immigration records. After telling me all this, Kabengele remembered a Mozambican student who did a dissertation on the topic, whom he will be working with for his PhD, and will contact on my behalf.

He noted that when he first came to Brazil, African students were the only black students registered in graduate programs. Now you see many Afro-Brazilian graduate students. We are probably entering a new phase in the relationship between Africans and Afro-Brazilians, as the latter become more educated about Africa thanks to the new education law, he said. Up until now, negative stereotypes dominated Brazilian views of Africa: Africans routinely get asked whether they have cars, TV, telephones and so on in Africa, and how many lions have they killed, etc. He has written a book on the realities of Africa to educate Afro-Brazilians, the regions they came from, and the current state of those regions. He promised to send me a copy of the book, entitled *To Understand the Black Man or Woman Today: History, Reality, Problems, and Paths*. Although he is not a historian, he has been forced to write about the subject because of the pressing need. At the University of São Paulo, the first professor to teach African history was appointed just four years ago, and now there are three who teach the subject.

On the changes in race relations in Brazil, he observed that when he first came to the country in 1975 it was almost taboo to discuss race. He mentioned the example of an

Indian colleague who had come to study the black middle class and was forced to change to studying the caste system in India. So the biggest change has been a change in consciousness. Brazil has started to accept itself as a racist country. This process started around 1980. But when asked if they themselves have practiced discrimination, most white Brazilians tend to say no. Studies now abound showing huge racial inequalities in education and the labor market, which have bolstered the case for affirmative action. Before 1980, racism was not punishable by law. After 1980, anti-racist laws were instituted, but the victims of racism tend to be powerless, so few people have actually been prosecuted and sent to jail for it.

The number of black professionals has increased; the CIAD II is partly a testimony to that, but deep material inequalities persist. He recalled how ex-President Cardoso once said he was almost thrown out of a room when he started talking about racism and affirmative action in an era when calling Brazil a racist country was almost an act of treason. Kabengele stressed that he himself became naturalized to minimize the effects of racism. In 2000, he was awarded the *Commandador Ordem do Merito Civico Cultural*. He noted that during CIAD II student demonstrations, many Africans did not seem to understand because Brazil has done such a great job of selling the myth of racial democracy, which has been discredited in Brazil itself but still has some resonance abroad. Many intellectuals and politicians in Brazil, of course, think that Brazil's problems are primarily about class rather than race.

He was quite emphatic that Africans need to educate themselves more about Brazil. It was not a coincidence that CIAD II was held in Salvador, Bahia. But Brazil is quite happy to show the world, and in this case the CIAD II delegates, Afro-Brazilian culture, to pay for their stay in expensive hotels, and show them the best parts of town to maintain the myth of racial democracy while shielding them from the national realities of racial inequality. He also noted that Afro-Brazilians do not often see themselves as black or as a diaspora. He gave an example of a taxi driver who was a *mestizo* and married to a black woman who, when told of CIAD II Kabengele had come to attend, said he did not know what diaspora meant. I suggested the need for African and diasporan intellectuals to put pressure on both African governments and Brazil to promote the teaching of diasporan and African history in schools. He agreed, but felt that it was hypocritical for Brazil to offer to help Africa when it has not resolved its own problems of racial inequality. Therefore, it would be more productive for African intellectuals to pressure Brazil, show solidarity with the struggles of Afro-Brazilians, and make the world realize what a racist country this is.

On the reasons for the changes in racial discourse and relations in Brazil, he stressed that the primary factor was the black movement, whose struggles he has observed since he came to Brazil in 1975. The rise of the feminist movement also played a role. The Durban Conference against Racism in 2001 galvanized the black movement and the anti-racist struggle. Black activists have forced political parties, especially Lula's current ruling party, to accept the specificity of race. For their part, intellectuals have increasingly denounced racism and the myth of racial democracy. There was the November 20, 1995 march commemorating Zumbi, during which issues concerning race, quilombos, and property rights were brought to the fore. Unfortunately, many people coming here are not aware of black struggles; they assume that there have been no struggles here because Brazil did not have policies such as segregation laws prevalent in the U.S. and apartheid South Africa. It is true that black struggles and the black movement have been divided and weakened in the past by color classifications, but it is misleading to assume that either is of recent vintage.

The conversation ended around 11:00 a.m., as he had a flight to catch. He briefly mentioned his son, married to Taynar, and his first grandchild. At that point, the smile of a proud father and grandfather broke through his reserve. He is obviously a serious, thoughtful man who has seen much and thought deeply about what animates his research and teaching, and I had a feeling he desperately wanted to talk directly to me without a translator. He knows some English, for he would occasionally demur with Veronica's translation. The interview is of course on tape, so it will be possible to capture the nuances of his analysis once the transcript is ready.

By the time we finished the interview the rain had stopped, so we decided to walk back to Pestana. We stopped by the cybercafé, where we had stopped a couple of times before, for Veronica to see if Taynar had left a message about Monday's appointments. I also wanted to check e-mail and read online newspapers. Unfortunately, all the computers were taken—there were mostly kids playing computer games, some looked as young as seven or eight. The cybercafé has about 30 computers divided into two rows. I was impressed that all would be taken on a late Sunday morning.

We checked e-mail in the hotel, which costs an arm and a leg compared to the cybercafés around the city. Hotels are engaged in daylight extortion when it comes to telephone and Internet charges. Taynar had not yet left a message. Veronica left me in the business office where I checked e-mail and read the papers. It was mostly about the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. So depressing, so dangerous, so disappointing, for a country born out of Europe's savagery—the barbarism of the Holocaust—is now, as it has done so many times, raining bombs and destroying factories, infrastructure, and homes of ordinary civilians. Its cynical backers in Washington and West European capitals look on in indifference against world opinion and the UN, which Israel so ferociously despises and dismisses, forgetting it owes its very creation to a UN resolution. I wonder, will a day come when westerners feel as guilty about their involvement in the destruction of the Palestinians, Lebanese, and others in the Middle East as they have done for at least two generations now about the Jewish holocaust? Will their descendants absolve them? What alibi will they give them? It won't be like they didn't know. It will have to be the hubris of imperial racism.

I decided to rest for the remainder of the day after a late lunch. It was well-deserved after a hectic week.

July 17, 2006

I was free in the morning, so I tried to catch up on some reading. In the afternoon, I had an interview with a leader of the *terreiro* Tanuri Junsara, Nation Candomblé Angola/Congo, Ms. Makota Valdina Costa Pinto. This is the first interview we had in somebody's house. She lives in one of the favelas. Her immediate neighborhood contains several houses and tailoring shops. It was a clean compound and a pretty, three-year-old girl wearing braids knocked on Ms. Pinto's door to announce she had visitors. I gave the little girl a hug. She was so cute.

Ms. Pinto welcomed us into her house. She is a tiny woman but speaks with a rich, booming voice. The living room, where we sat, was filled with bookshelves and a bureau and a table, on which was a computer. There was a colored cloth partition leading to

another room. Veronica and I sat on a bench and Ms. Pinto sat on a chair by the computer facing us. She was wearing a green turtleneck and a brownish skirt.

Ms. Pinto is 73 years old. The *terreiro* (temple) she belongs to is 51 years old; she was initiated in 1975. She said she considers herself very privileged to have grown up in this community, which was once rural and all black. She appreciated the values represented here, which in her youth were quite different. People lived in a collective, communal way, in which one's family was not confined to blood relatives. These values were rooted in traditions from the Congo and Angola, they were grounded in Bantu culture, she said. She recalled that she grew up surrounded by African words whose meaning and strong powers she only fully understood when she went to school. All this made her develop into a person with a strong black identity, and into the woman she is today.

When she was growing up there were no churches around; spiritual sustenance was provided by Candomblé religion, which was so normal because it was all around her. Every adult in Candomblé could be a mother or father to children in the community. Today, things are quite different because if you are not a parent you cannot chastise or discipline the children of other people. The idea of sharing was important in her youth, especially during important occasions of births, weddings, and deaths. The old communal life no longer survives in the same way because of the progress and values of modern life. She understands that Africa, too, has changed, but hopes it has not lost its old values of sharing and communal life. It is because of the strong values and traditions with which she was raised that she acquired the spirit, the agency to fight for justice and equality.

Since becoming a member of Candomblé, she has worked hard to share her story, her deep subjective understanding of the religion, which tends to be objectified and exoticized in academic writings by outsiders. She started talking to schools to tell her version of Candomblé's vision of the world, one that is different from the version witnessed by tourists, one that is not politicized. Candomblé has a holistic view of the world and sees the environment not only as a material force but also in its social dimensions. Most people in the environmental movement tend to talk about animals, but people are part of the environment, and racism undermines the environment. In Candomblé, as in much African thought, there is no distinction or dichotomy between society and nature as in western thought. The material and social environments are connected so that racism and social justice issues are environmental issues and cannot be compartmentalized. She believes that Candomblé and the nations need to open themselves beyond spiritual issues; they need to talk about social issues as well. Whatever she gets from the outside world she tries to bring it to the *terreiro*, and vice-versa. She believes knowledge cannot be a personal possession; anything she is privileged to know she is prepared to share.

I asked her about the Bantu words that she remembered. She mentioned several whose meanings I could not fathom, but they did sound Bantu. She recalled a song her grandmother used to sing to her, which she found out later was a ritual prayer. She noted that language is a very important part of identity, and the enslaved Africans weren't allowed to keep their languages and values. But they were able to in Candomblé. When she was initiated, she was given the name of Zimewanga, which a Kikongo linguist explained means a person who takes away suffering or stops suffering. I wondered whether it was synonymous with *sing'anga* in my language, Chichewa. Candomblé has been a space in which Afro-Brazilians have been able to restore, save, and salvage their black African identity.

She maintained that Candomblé has made significant contributions to black culture. Indeed, it has played a central role in the preservation of cultural traditions for black

people. In Candomblé, all is integrated, it is connected to sacred performance and cannot be separated into art or folklore. Outsiders have tried to folklorize it, they sometimes call Candomblé grotesque and they sometimes exploit it, commercialize it as a whole or only aspects of it. Candomblé is a living religion; it provides a different way of being in the world, of respecting one another, being with each other, interacting with nature; a way of seeing the world as indivisible. Followers of Candomblé have a lot to give to the world but they won't be able to do so until they become subjects in the telling of their own stories. She gave examples of institutions here that use aspects of Candomblé to promote themselves.

As for the attitudes of the wider community and the state toward Candomblé, she noted that they were changing. The biggest difference has been in terms of political attitudes as evident in the policies of the current government. There is now an opportunity for dialogue. She has been invited to Brasília several times to speak to Parliament, and in other official forums, about issues connected to the environment and health of the Afro-Brazilian population. Thus, after 50 years of struggle, the government at all levels, from the federal to the state to municipal, are now willing to listen. This is an important moment in history. These strides have been made possible by the struggles of the black movement and the followers of Candomblé. The invitations for dialogue are making people in Candomblé feel important. Clearly, this didn't come from the sky; the black community has been fighting to be included on the national agenda and dialogues. In general, the black movement has had respect for Candomblé, even among those who are not followers of Candomblé.

One of the biggest challenges facing Candomblé is how to deal with the neo-Pentecostal movement that is alienating us from ourselves; turning anything that is related to the African religious matrix into something evil or satanic, she said sadly. This movement is making people get away from their roots, which is dangerous, for if you don't know who you are, you are lost. There is no need for the neo-Pentecostals to denigrate Candomblé, which is an integral part of Afro-Brazilian culture. When I asked why she thinks this movement has grown so rapidly, she responded that there were a series of factors. Fundamentally, she believes this movement is not religious but political, a kind of brainwashing, in so far as the neo-Pentecostals have representatives at every level of government from the local council to the federal government. Many of these establishments operate as commercial houses for their leaders to accumulate power, many of whom lack formal religious training. Their appeal lies, in part, in the fact that they work with real problems, the problems of real people in pain and suffering from poverty and unemployment. The neo-Pentecostal movement is promoting materialism when the purpose of religion is not material gain but inner peace. They exploit people's genuine problems.

Candomblé's connections to Africa, she noted, are indirect. Candomblé is something Afro-Brazilians re-created from diverse African religious traditions, and the traditions have been passed on from one generation to the next. In this way, traditions have been kept alive. She has been to Africa twice. In 1988, the centenary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil, she went for two weeks to Angola. She stayed mostly in a hotel and noted that big cities everywhere are often the same. She did not have an opportunity to go into the interior where traditions are kept alive. Recently—she wasn't sure whether it was in 2001, 2002, or 2003—she went to Benin where she participated in a major religious festival. She would like to see more of Congo and Angola and connect to the roots of her traditions.

She insisted that Afro-Brazilians had created and elaborated their religious practices here as a way of preserving identity. She is aware that other enslaved Africans in other

countries kept other traditions, such as Lukumi, Santeria, and Palo. What is important, she said, is for us to know more about each other's religious traditions.

Ms. Pinto recalled the privilege of meeting someone from the Congo, a man called Banseki, who was both a traditionalist and a PhD, whose writings draw parallels and illuminate the influence of the Congo on Brazil in so far as many of the ethnic groups that came to Brazil were from the Congo region. She lamented that there were not enough exchanges with Africa, for she would like to know what practices have been preserved in Africa and here. The language in Candomblé, for example, is an antique language that is probably no longer used in Africa. She remembers meeting a young African man who didn't value traditional religion. This brought her to tears. She responded to him by saying perhaps, as an African in Africa, he didn't have to honor those traditions, but for those in the diaspora these traditions were a way of keeping Africa alive. Probably, she concluded, we have something to share with the young Africans. She observed that she considers anybody in Africa an ancestor.

Finally, we discussed how she felt when she first visited Africa. She said there were no words to describe her experiences in Congo and Angola. She had similar emotions when she visited Benin to attend the National Voodoo Day. There was religion everywhere. Candomblé differs from Voodoo, she stressed. She was also moved when she visited Haiti last year where she saw Voodoo. It is a fact that we have kept our traditions; seeing the similarities and differences moved her deeply. You do not see Candomblé in Africa or pure African practices in Brazil, but there is a commonality, a connection, which is so evident everywhere she has been. I told her how I felt sitting on the rocks the other Sunday, watching the waves and thinking of all those slave ships landing on these shores with our people and marveling at our survival, that perhaps some of those frolicking by the beach were my distant relatives. She agrees that we are, indeed, connected by the invisible ties of history; they were Brazilians but that did not negate their Africanness.

There was a quiet passion to her voice, which, when combined with the wind bells chiming outside the window, gave the interview an aural gravity of a religious convocation. A young woman, probably in her late teens, dropped by and listened intently to Ms. Pinto as we were coming to the end of our conversation. I asked Ms. Pinto, as we were about to leave, if that was her granddaughter. She said no, and in a barely detectable voice of regret, she said she had no children of her own, and then cheerfully added she had many children in the community. She gave me a tight embrace.

On the way back to the hotel I commented how profoundly moving I found the interview with Ms. Pinto—such probity, such passion, such love for her people. Veronica agreed; she appeared to have been moved as well. We decided to stop by an open restaurant a block or so away from the hotel for an early dinner. The interview had lasted more than two hours and it was now after 5:00 p.m. We had grilled fish with rice and salad. Simple and delicious, the meal tasted even better with the sounds of the waves of the ocean rolling against the rocks nearby. If only all research was so much fun! After dinner we parted ways, and for the rest of the evening I reflected on the interview with Ms. Pinto and watched some TV.

July 18, 2006

This has been an unusually busy day, with four separate interviews. We started by going to Jorge Amado University, where we talked to Professor Juvenal de Carvalho, a historian

and head of the department of History. Mindful of what happened last time we tried to have a meeting, this time we arrived early, too early in fact. I waited for Veronica in the lobby and when I saw her taxi pull up I went outside and hopped in. We arrived there just after 10:00 a.m. for the 11:00 a.m. interview, so we decided to have coffee. I would have loved to have eaten a muffin or something sweet with the coffee, but all the snacks had some meat or cheese in them. At 10:45 a.m., we walked down to his office but found it closed. Within a few minutes he came rushing in, apparently the attendant upstairs who had been so friendly the first day we came here told him of our arrival.

A man of average build and friendly disposition and wearing a short-sleeved shirt, he ushered us in after a firm handshake. We passed the secretary's office into his compact office, which was separated from the secretary by a wood and glass partition. As seems customary, he offered us some coffee. Veronica introduced me and my research project and asked if he could tell us a bit about his own before answering specific questions. Like many of the professors I have met, he has an MA degree and is waiting to study for his PhD. His MA was on a weekly magazine, *Veja*, the country's longest running magazine. He examined its coverage of the Angolan civil war. He argued that the print media functions as an important vehicle for framing identity, especially national identity, and in this case, he was interested in examining how the magazine covered Africa during the Angolan civil war and how the images it produced affected the formation of Afro-Brazilian identities.

As for CIAD II, he noted that while the local press covered it well, the national press virtually ignored it, a clear demonstration of press collaboration in the national tendency of ignoring the black realities of Brazil. There was no coverage of the conference in weekly magazines and it was mentioned on national TV news only once—on the last day. This falls into a pattern in which black issues are omitted or depicted in a negative light, and for Africa, it entails ignoring the continent entirely or showing the negative images of death, misery, poverty, and conflicts, which impact negatively on Afro-Brazilians' self-image and self-esteem. Now he is interested in examining how the World Cup was covered in the Brazilian media.

The construction of black identity in Brazil has been an extremely painful process—one that involved construction, affirmation and consolidation. Thirty years ago, no one claimed to be black or did black things such as braid their hair. These difficulties can be traced back to slavery, which had a very particular character in Brazil. Not only was it exceptionally brutal, but a racial criteria was established among blacks based on skin color and sharp distinctions were drawn between Brazilian-born creoles and African-born slaves. The latter were given more backbreaking work, such as sugarcane production than the former. This system of differentiation undermined black solidarity. Thus, there was a racial differentiation in the wider society and color differentiations among the enslaved themselves.

As the abolition debate and movement gathered momentum, the biggest question was what to do with the black population, which outnumbered the white. The state adopted three policies: first, promotion of white immigration and prohibition of black immigration; second, the encouragement of miscegenation—it was believed that because of their physical inferiority, blacks would eventually disappear; and third, extermination, in which active efforts were made to physically eliminate black people, a policy that persists in the extermination of black youths today. Connected to physical extermination was cultural extermination, deliberate policies to stop the formation of black identity, to discourage any connection to Africa. The whitening process of Brazil's population and culture

instituted white models of beauty, dress, and class. The idea was promoted among black people that their children's lives would be much better than theirs if they were lighter.

These ideas were already popular by the time of abolition in 1888, and were promoted eagerly thereafter. Thus, long before Gilberto Freyre in the 1920s and 1930s gathered official support, the idea of racial democracy—the notion that there was no racial discrimination in Brazil—was already being propagated in the media. In Freyre's scheme, whites were rational, Indians indolent, and blacks happy. He took elements from each community, such as samba and capoeira from the blacks, to forge the great Brazilian national identity. This process, the myth of racial democracy, dominated social relations until the 1970s when it was questioned and discredited by social scientists and social movements. This ushered in a new phase in the construction of black identity. Two factors can account for this change.

First, the extermination plans and whitening policy had failed, as it was clear that the Afro-Brazilian population had survived and still constituted half the population. Second, culturally, African identity had survived, even flourished. Many spaces survived and existed throughout Brazil in which black and African religious practice, names, ways of being, and philosophies sustained Afro-Brazilian identity. These cultural traits are dispersed throughout Brazilian culture even in places where people don't realize it. For example, Brazilian Portuguese is Africanized with words from the Bantu-speaking world in terms of vocabulary, tonality, and ways of speaking.

As we drove to the old town, Professor Carvalho mentioned other cultural practices, including throwing flowers into the sea and wearing white on New Year's Day. Other factors that kept African culture alive and enabled the black movement to grow included music, the labor movement, Abdias do Nascimento and his work, experimental theatre, political organizations, and *afro blocos* (informal Afro-Brazilian street percussion groups) all of which challenged the dominant negative depictions of blacks and valorized Africa and spread knowledge. We, he said emphatically, survived culturally and physically; they couldn't exterminate us. However, he stressed, we can't talk about a black identity in Brazil, but of black identities in the plural.

I asked him about the existence of alternative media sources for African images in Afro-Brazilian communities. He observed that the black media industry is poorly developed, few black magazines exist and black representation on TV is also limited, often confined to American or French TV shows so that alternative images of Africa are not readily available. The biggest sources of alternative images continue to be *afro blocos* that are covered during carnival.

This led us to a discussion on the challenges of teaching African history. He expressed hope that things will improve with the new education law mandating the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian histories. But up 'til now, the situation has been bad. Very few quality textbooks are available—he mentioned those by Alberto da Costa Silva and Roland Oliver. Only four of the eight volumes of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* are available in Portuguese. Bookstores and libraries are reluctant to import books from abroad, claiming a lack of market. He often depends on friends donating or bringing books from abroad, usually from Europe or Angola and Mozambique. Primary works on Africa by Brazilian scholars tend to be by those studying slavery or Afro-Brazilian religions that focus on the African end of the story as part of their analyses. There are hardly any Brazilian historians studying Africa for its own sake.

There is barely any access to the works of scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop, Elikia M'bokolo, and Joseph Ki-Zerbo. He mentioned three important journals published on

Africa in Brazil: *Afro-Asia* (by UFRA, available online), *Estudios do Afroasiático* in Rio, and *Revista do Centro dos Estudos Africanos da USP* (São Paulo). He urged collaboration between African and Afro-Brazilian historians, that they need to exchange bibliographies and conduct joint research and publishing. It would be wonderful to organize joint conferences and encourage young Afro-Brazilian historians to study Africa as the primary field of their research. I suggested I would explore the idea of a historians' conference with colleagues at CODESRIA and fellow historians, and the possibilities of young Afro-Brazilian scholars attending CODESRIA institutes, and perhaps graduate training for diasporan and African graduate students as originally envisaged for this project. There is a growing interest in African history—he knows many friends who would like to specialize in it but are held back for lack of resources.

We discussed two further issues: first, struggles against the whitening campaign, and second, connections between Afro-Brazilians and other diasporas. He noted that there was small, localized resistance that may have contested whiteness, but these are difficult to decipher. The larger organizations, such as Frente Negra Brasileira, fought but were less interested in promoting a black identity than in assimilation and integration. Many of these organizations were closed during the dictatorship. Even in the experimental theatre movement, Carnival, or the all black trade unions, the promotion of a racial agenda was rather muted. As late as 1979, Candomblé was illegal.

As for diaspora connections, he noted that up to the nineteenth century there were an average 300 migrations per year between Brazil and Africa. In the twentieth century, to go to Africa you had to go through Europe. In the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, there were serious Brazilian concerns about African competition in the world market for cocoa and coffee, concerns that increased after African independence as African countries sought to increase production. Afro-Brazilians, he noted, have no clue that there are other African diasporas in South America. Many don't believe that the tango in Argentina has African roots, for they don't know there are blacks in the country.

Contacts are much better developed with the United States, whose civil rights and black power movements served as a lighthouse for Brazil. More recently, funk and hip hop music have spread, as well as affirmative action policies. Professor Carvalho was rather unhappy that CIAD II had little representation from the other diasporas, but he was nonetheless pleased that the conference was held. He expressed hope that he will be able to visit Africa soon, at least by 2008, to do his PhD field research. He has contacts with African students here. We ended the discussion with thoughts on where would be the best venue for a possible joint historians' conference—his preference was for an African venue.

Next, I was looking forward to talking to the two young activists who had taken part in the demonstration that disrupted the plenary at CIAD II. We met in the CEAO library. The young woman was named Suedi Kinte, and the young man was Nkosi; he didn't give his last name. I was immediately struck by their adoption of African names. They wore African clothing and Suedi wore her hair naturally, while Nkosi had an afro in a bandana. I began by thanking them for coming to meet with me and told them how touched I was by two events: the youth panel on cultural production where Suedi made an impassioned intervention, and the demonstration where I saw many of the students from the earlier panel.

Nkosi introduced himself as an artist from the hip hop movement. He is from Santo André, in São Paulo. He is a rapper, part of a group called *Amandla*. They rap about black identity, black consciousness, the reality that they live, and reflections on what they

live. They use hip hop to organize people; it serves both as a cultural tool and a political tool. They work in collaboration with various organizations and groups, in particular with people from the black movement. Right now, we are fighting against racism in general and for quotas, in particular, he said emphatically.

Suedi is from here, Salvador. She is studying journalism. She said she believes in the black movement. It isn't just a marginalized effort by a few activists, but a powerful movement of black men and women in Brazil to fight for our survival and our rights that have been denied to us for generations. She belongs to a group called *Uhuru: Africa Hip Hop*. While it's not necessary to be part of an organization to be within the movement, organizations are crucial tools for black people to undertake collective actions, to advance their cause.

For her, she continued, this is a life project. It is a struggle that includes overcoming the life of misery, building something strong—a foundation for a better future for her people. We live with historical realities that have been constructed by both material conditions and intellectual and ideological justifications, she noted. So we must understand these realities in all their dimensions. We must be educated. For us to succeed, we must rebuild our communities, make them stronger, she said. For this, their first goal is to have cohesive black families. On a more personal level, her dream is to establish her career as a journalist, to be able to complete her master's abroad, to get to know other realities, and to acquire ways to sustain her and eventually retire. I couldn't help chuckling to myself when she mentioned the word retire, something that I often think about as I get older; here was someone in her early twenties planning of retirement!

For Nkosi, to be black in a racist world entails continuous struggle, fighting for immediate needs and gains. So we learn to have very little, he lamented. One of the results of this is that we don't dream. So in effect, dreaming is in itself a militant, revolutionary act. It's important that we think about what we want. There are dreams that are more collectively oriented, which include making sure blacks have access to the universities, employment, and health care; to have real access. Then on a personal level, he continued, at the same time we also have to imagine what is coming up for us since time doesn't stop, and neither should we. In his case, as an individual, he wants to become a university professor, to record a CD and succeed in distributing the music that he makes. He doesn't see contradictions in these two career goals. I thought of Cornel West's hip hop CD. Nkosi also wants to raise his son in a less racist society and make sure he doesn't suffer as much as he has.

When we turned to the current political situation in Brazil, they both became quite animated. To start with, Nkosi began, Brazil is a very rich country but also deeply unequal. The black population feels this inequality the most. This contradiction within such a rich country impedes many things from happening. It stops a lot of "pretty" laws, laws that are good on paper, from being implemented, from becoming a reality. This is evident in the way blacks are treated. So, he continued, we need to undo the concentration of resources; until then most of the laws will stay on paper and at the level of good intentions. He also pointed out that this facilitates the exploitation and subordination of Brazil to the United States. Despite Lula becoming president, the rich still govern; the state continues to serve as a space for the class interests of dominant elites, not for the well-being of the common people. He worries about how all this wealth can be redistributed. It's hard to imagine politicians and the elites letting go of so much privilege. I have no clue as to how this can be done, he sighed, unless we, who are on the outside, take over. In effect, this means a revolution, I don't know. He quickly recovered his bravado. That's why we believe in the importance of organizing people concretely, confronting and fighting more directly

until the day things change, otherwise we will always be in the 'backward' situation that we find ourselves.

Suedi concluded the conversation by stressing that when we talk about the political and economic issues in Brazil, we can't forget to discuss the structural parameters that force black people to live under these degrading conditions. They include the history of slavery, racism, and dictatorships. The very size of Brazil and its enormous riches are also part of the problem in terms of organizing effective national protest movements. The entrenched system of exploitation and oppression continues to push harder on more people every day. This system has survived many political movements; its exploitative and repressive tendencies have remained in the DNA of the nation-state from the days of the slave trade to the republic, from the republic to democracy. Brazilian democracy only guarantees the rights of the elite. This is a fabulously wealthy country, shamefully unable to meet the needs of many of its people because of its rigid class and racial structures. Her voice rose, we are the children of those who constructed Brazil and yet our people have never received what they were owed. You know, we are denied access to our heritage and legacy. The more the black movement works to get us out of the margins, and by us, I mean the Afro-Indigenous populations that make up the excluded communities within Brazil, the better will be this country's future. Otherwise, we are headed for an explosion. She emphasized the need for solidarity between blacks and the indigenous people. Brazil didn't start when the Portuguese arrived, she sneered.

As I listened to them, I wondered how my students would compare. Unfortunately, poorly, I thought. They were both going to another event, and I thanked them, again, and gave them my card and expressed the hope that I would meet them again someday.

Our next meeting was with a remarkable academic, Professor Maria de Lourdes Siqueira. We met at Alaide do Feijão, a restaurant in Pelourinho. She is an anthropologist. She received her doctorate degree in Paris and currently works on the Afro-Brazilian population. She is a director of Ilê Aiyê. She has been initiated into a Candomblé as an *Ikétú*, an elder. It was this opportunity, that helped deepen her understanding of the African roots of the religion, she said.

Her work challenges many of the conventional theories about Afro-Brazilian communities and cultures. These hegemonic theories are incapable of capturing Afro-Brazilian realities because they are positivistic and ethno-centric, i.e., European. She always tells her students on the first day of class that she hopes they come out of her course with greater capacity to live and coexist with her difference since they are mostly white and members of the upper classes. She tries to show them that her heritage is not a factor or an index of inferiority to be used for hierarchical classifications; rather it is an integral part of Brazil's collective strength.

She has been in Bahia for the last 30 years, but is originally from the north of Brazil, the state of Maranhão. There we have another black culture and identity, she said. Her mother was a leader, founder, and owner of the Quilombo dos Matones do Moreira. Also, her godmother, and simultaneously great aunt, was the first professor-diplomat of her city, Cordo de Maranhão. Her great aunt was born in 1886, a couple of years prior to the abolition of slavery. She had an opportunity to study and become a teacher. In 1908, she went to Cordo, her homeland, where it was a rare phenomenon to find an educated mestiza, daughter of a slave woman and slave master to make it to school. Maria's cultural, educational, and social work was inspired by her great aunt.

She recounted in absorbing detail her involvement in the struggles for democratization, as well as for grassroots reform, change, and social inclusion in education and rural transformation. Because of this grassroots experience, she won a UNESCO scholarship, in

1997, to study in Mexico, where she studied more about education within the rural populations of Latin America. When she returned from Mexico, she went to Rio de Janeiro to work in the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. There, she started working clandestinely with some radical political organizations. These organizations worked throughout the country during the dictatorship. It's because of this that she spent almost a year in jail, in addition to losing two very important compilation projects on agrarian reform. After the year in jail, she lost her employment and went to Mexico before coming to Bahia. It's here in Bahia that her black consciousness work started again.

Turning to Afro-Brazilian cultures, she noted the black community in Bahia is different from those in other parts of the country. Black communities, of course, also share some similarities. The commonalities could be traced to the fact that they all have a general African heritage and legacy. They have the same scars, marks left from slavery and colonialism. They share the resistance and the struggles to fight back. We all helped construct and build this country, she stressed. We all helped in maintaining black communities; in particular, black women have helped in securing black communities. We have all fought for our dignity and are developing the pride of what it means to be black. Where Afro-Brazilians differ, the specificity of their identities comes primarily from the different groups brought here from diverse parts of Africa to do different work. For example, in Maranhão, the overwhelming majority belonged to Jêjê, Efon, and Mina ethnic groups. There, we have the religions called Tambor de Mina, Tambor de Creola, and Bumba Meu Boi. These are more Jêjê, from ancient Dahomey. The other religions you'll find there are Tereco and Incantados. This again is connected to Dahomey's heritage. While here, Angola, Jêjê, Yoruba, and Congo are represented. These factors make a difference and they are visible in terms of how cultures are organized, general world views, day to day life, languages, practices, etc.

She continued, the colonial system of slavery determined where the enslaved Africans were sent and the subsequent development of their cultures. They had different departure and arrival ports. The particularities of the system created various positions, locations, and groupings. It happened in the U.S., as you find certain populations that worked with particular crops like in the Carolinas for rice, as you know, she said, looking at me.

At that point, she introduced us to a colleague, Ozvalrizio do Espirio Santo. Maria told us she had to go shortly and wondered if we would like if Ozvalrizio could answer some of the questions that she didn't get to answer. I wanted her to elaborate on Afro-Brazilian women's history and challenges, including her own as a scholar-activist. The black woman has always been the main articulator and disseminator of our culture, she said. She has always been mother, caretaker of others, religious leader, cultural leader, etc. She has always been the pillar of our community, passing African cultures through the prayers, rituals and oral traditions. During the times of slavery, she worked in the house of the slave-owner and in her own home. She raised the children of the plantation owner, her own children, and the children of other Africans who either died or were taken away; she always gave milk from her breast to whoever needed it. The oral tradition of black women kept African cultures alive.

The black woman has always worked a lot, she stressed. When slavery was abolished, black people were left on the streets, destitute; they were left with nothing, were illiterate, without land, without work, with nothing. The black woman secured things and held the community together. She was the one that started to integrate into the labor force. She continues to, as the black woman has historically been the principal caretaker of her home and domestic worker in other people's homes; outside of the home she is primarily

the elementary school teacher or nurse. Now, she continued, we are starting to see some women in the universities. There are few working to get advanced degrees in higher education, for example in medicine, like Ozvalrizio's sister, she smiled at him. It's exceptional to find a black woman doctor. In fact, just to find people from our generation with degrees is hard; there aren't many of us.

Since 1992, she has been the only black female professor with a PhD at her university. Her role is, therefore, very important. She has a big responsibility as the sole black female professor. It is a struggle always trying to prove your competence, she said shaking her head. She noted that there used to be a black woman minister in the government, who left tragically from that position. There is now another black minister, in addition to the handful of black women taking a few high-level positions. Affirmative action is now allowing black women to elevate their status and access other levels in society. That is what is allowing more black women to enter the university. However, society as a whole still does not respect black women as they do white women. The statistics show that black women can often get paid half for the same work that a white woman does.

So her first challenge is to be alive in this society as a woman, as a militant black woman, as a professor with doctorate degree. In 1971, when she was in prison, no one thought she would return. Since it was during the dictatorship and this was the time of torture and disappearances, it was a hard time. That, and the fact she was a black woman. Her family went six months without knowing where she was. Nonetheless, she stood firm and didn't say anything to anyone in the prison. So, I see it like this, I am happy to be alive, she said firmly. Just that has been the greatest challenge. Another challenge has been being loyal to her principles. She hasn't betrayed her beliefs, her principles, her colleagues, or her family who raised her to be loyal and dignified. Another big challenge was to return to the outside world after being in jail. It was challenging to reconstruct myself and my life, she said. So she threw herself into her studies, completing grad school, applying for some teaching jobs again, and going abroad. She lived for five years in France, went to Africa, then Mexico for her exchange fellowship. Another challenge is to resist the racism that Afro-Brazilians suffer every day, she said. It's a challenge to not give up the fight, to not go into depression, to not let it all go. Every day there is an invitation to quit and retire. The lack of respect, the inequality, the challenges, the internal bickering; it's a continuous struggle.

Another challenge is to continue to be in solidarity. It's not easy to stay open, even with colleagues. So it's challenging to be a militant upholding the resistance, to maintain dignity and pride and be in solidarity. A lot of times one wants to, one has a desire to quit. She would prefer to stay home writing, but it's important to keep interacting, building with other people. Today, another great challenge is among the black militants. In our family, the black family is overwhelmingly a poor family, she said. Individually, our families are also needy. The challenge is to assist those of us that are deep within the desperation of poverty and misery. It can't be an individual fight. In addition to being a part of the collective militant fight, we must also help raise our families out of their desperation, be it through economic, intellectual and/or moral support. She summed it all up by saying we have to affirm our dignity, we have to maintain our sensibilities not get hard and distant, and we have to get comfort, peace in being black and proud, as well as in being competent.

In conclusion, she noted that Brazil's President Lula faces enormous challenges on how to deal with the black community. The twenty-first century has to be, will be, Africa's century, she thinks.

We believe that this century, the black population of the world has to make a change. We cannot continue in the same way that we are. The actions of the black movement changed this country. We are more conscious of what ails this country, of the pervasiveness of racism, and of our identity as black people. We understand that we have African values. We are conscious of our African knowledge and African wisdom here. We are conscious of our dignity. We are conscious of the roles that women have to play, whether it's in Africa or here; that she has to occupy a space, a role as one of the builders of this country. The black woman is an educator of excellent caliber; she is the principal pillar of education. If our education system is now bad, it would be much worse if it could not rely upon the black woman. At the end, we took a picture with her and exchanged business cards and I thanked her for a most enlightening conversation.

Ozvalrizio focused most of his comments on changes in Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions using Ilê Aiyê as a starting point. In 1974, when we started, he said, it was the beginnings of a behavioral change in the population. First, this began elevating the self-esteem of black Brazilians. With Ilê Aiyê's new image, a change of the norm and stereotypical images, the black person started to find herself or himself as well as his or her self-esteem. This was a fundamental change in terms of accepting their bodies, changing their style of dress, taking care of their hair. Black people stopped wanting to use the hot comb to straighten (whiten) their hair, people started embracing their color and stopped wanting to fit the white standard. We started to see the beauty that black people have and therefore started considering ourselves beautiful, he said triumphantly. So we saw a flux, black men verbalizing that they considered black women beautiful and vice versa.

This was an initial step toward consciousness-raising. After this, they started finding out that the next step in this process was really in their education. Ilê Aiyê also saw this development of improving their education as part of its work, as a tool to help improve Afro-Brazilian economic and employment realities. In effect, we started jumping over the limitations that held us down, he said. He discussed earlier educational efforts after abolition and the institutional barriers put in place by the church and the state. He recounted the role of black Muslims in starting to educate others in becoming literate. They used the Q'uaran to stimulate the education of their fellow brethren. So we have been confronting and finding ways to overcome these limitations/barriers in these ways in education particularly, for a long time now, he noted. But these restrictions were and continue to be great.

The support networks that we have to help us confront these barriers included the *terreiros* of *Candomblé* or *Candomblé* houses. That has been a constant source of support. However, it is only within the last twenty years that Afro-Brazilians have had a cultural change; now people proudly claim to be practicing *Candomblé*. Prior to this, they would still practice and go to *terreiros*, but when asked what religion they practiced, they would say that they were Catholics or Baptists. And they started to tell Africa's history on their own terms; they talked about Angola, Mozambique, and other African countries. They would make sure to talk about various aspects of the different countries, from their histories, to their economies, their heroes, their natural resources, etc. The history of Africa was no longer lost and gone. The Brazilian educational system teaches the white version of Africa after the slave trade; white intellectuals tried to destroy everything pertaining to our larger history, he lamented. So we started reconstructing the histories and piecing together the current realities of Africa for ourselves.

Ilê Aiyê really started as an alternative way to give young black folk access to Carnival, to be able to enjoy Carnival, to really participate in the festivities. Because prior to that,

Carnival maintained the false racial democracy game as well, and the overwhelming majority of black people were there doing some form of service work, either playing in the band or providing the security of a human line, separating the white "legitimate" Carnival participants from the street partiers, who were mostly black. Before Ilê Aiyê, he stated, there were no spaces, no blocos that allowed us to join, no place for us to just let go and have fun.

We started to work against racism on other levels in addition to creating a Carnival bloco; we became an organization that did cultural and political work to promote and better the black community. It became very clear to us that we could not just do this cultural work without really addressing some of the big educational issues, so we started readdressing the fact that Afro-Brazilians were educated within the white standards of education, in fact miseducated. Ilê Aiyê started its educational projects with a strong African cultural slant from there on.

He concluded by discussing the class dynamics within the Afro-Brazilian community. He argued that there was no black middle class in Brazil. Seeing the surprise on my face, he clarified, there are black Brazilians within the middle class, but that doesn't make us a separate class or group, there are too few of us. There is no black community making their own claim within the middle classes. We do have intellectuals, doctors, etc. who successfully entered the middle class, he said, but we're not our own class. Now, however, with the quotas being instilled and practiced, this should help change this fact. There are other organizations working on this. The reality is that Brazil has many black people here, thanks to the slave trade, but since abolition, Brazil has done nothing to sustain or improve conditions in this society. However, the Reparations Statue is working its way in the system to undo this wrong. The first item under this statue is to address the miseducation of the black community. Offering access to black Brazilians to universities is the first item under this statue. The way he sees it, as long as Afro-Brazilians continue on the path that they have started, they will make great strides, and, if they can solidify this, they will have made huge gains in their long history of suffering and struggle.

Again, we took a picture with him and thanked him for his time and for sharing his insights. As we left the restaurant, Veronica and I agreed it had been an incredibly productive day, but we were both exhausted.

July 19, 2006

The day started with a visit to the office of the Centro de Estudos Afro Orientais (CEAO) located in the old part of the city. As has become routine now, we went by taxi, passed through yet another part of the city, and saw yet again the mixture of old and new buildings, affluent and poor neighborhoods, and the equally mixed crowds of people shopping, waiting for buses, or simply loitering. As we waited for the director to welcome us into his office, we ran into Taynar who had had a meeting at the Center. It was good to see her and we chit-chatted for a while. Veronica and I decided to formulate questions for the director in advance, for we thought he would probably be too busy for the kind of extended interviews we have been having. That turned out to be an understatement.

He welcomed us warmly enough. In Brazil's rather complicated racial classification I couldn't quite make out what he was—is he what they call "dirty" white or a high-

yellow who could pass in American terms? He quickly explained the worth of CEAO, which was founded in 1959. Even then, he summarily cut his outline saying all that information was explained in a brochure that he gave us. CEAO is made up of five units — the Afro-Brazilian Museum, Library, Bookstore, Auditorium, and Administrative Department for Research and Extension. In addition CEAO publishes a journal, *Afro-Ásia*, published since 1965 jointly with the History Department of UFB. CEAO runs various programs including the Fábrica de Idéias (Faculty of Ideas) an academic department that handles the Advanced Course on Ethnic and Racial Relations and African Culture, which is currently directed by Livio Sansome who popped in to ask the director, Jocélio Teles dos Santos, for lunch in 20 minutes. It also has a wide range of educational and citizenship programs directed at adolescent and youth sectors of the black population as well as partnership and exchange programs involving bilateral agreements with foreign universities including the Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and the Council on International Exchange (CIE) Programs that brings students and faculty from the U.S.

Moreover, CEAO offers various courses, seminars, and conferences to which it invites guest lecturers and researchers from abroad, and organizes workshops for local academics and researchers. Furthermore, CEAO organizes and sponsors various events designed for the good of the black community, such as lectures, seminars, conferences, meetings and assemblies, anniversaries, receptions and solemn sessions, and launching of books, journals, and CDs of black artists and intellectuals. Finally, CEAO has a section on Education and Citizenship that deals with social advancement of the black community of Salvador which handles projects developed in partnership with social organizations and under bilateral agreements with NGOs and official agencies, and a section dealing with translation projects that seeks to translate into Portuguese and publish the work of African, Asian, and Latin American scholars.

Given the centrality of CEAO in Afro-Brazilian studies and its exchanges with institutions abroad, including some in Africa, I expected and would have benefitted from a comprehensive conversation with dos Santos. But it was clear he didn't want to be bothered and, as if on cue, Sansome's lunch invitation confirmed we even had less time than we thought. He briefly noted that the Faculty of Ideas brought 35 PhD or MA students, for four weeks every year, some of whom are from Africa, and 150 students come every year under the CIE program. He boasted that CEAO was the first in Latin America to create and offer interdisciplinary graduate courses in African studies.

He talked about the development of Afro-Brazilian religions since the nineteenth century and mentioned quilombos in the most general of terms. In a similar vein, he mentioned the role of the black movement, noting that today there are many institutions and there is fragmentation in the movement, especially along gender lines. As for connections between Afro-Brazilian culture and other diasporan cultures in the Americas, he could only think of conferences and symposia as effective media of exchange. Equally perfunctory were his remarks on connections between Afro-Brazilian culture and African cultures. I tried to bring up the Black Atlantic paradigm whose architect, Paul Gilroy, he said would be visiting later this year, but it elicited little response from him except to say that the Black Atlantic must include Africa, and that connections between Brazil and Africa exist through Nigeria, Benin, Cape Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. He spent more time telling us about the role played by CEAO and two other institutions that have dominated the study of Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

By the time we finished, I had exchanged several glances with Veronica and we were ready to leave. The only consolation was that he spoke English and Veronica was saved from translating and I was saved from listening to his laconic and misdirected answers through translation. We exchanged cards, on my part more out of formality than anything else. The interview barely lasted half an hour. We thought we had been scheduled for an hour.

Our next meeting was with Silvio, who I wanted to talk to us more about his analysis of the Brazilian economy. I had five discussion points prepared for him: first, his analysis of the main historical phases in the development of the Brazilian economy and its current state; second, the role of Afro-Brazilians in the development of the economy through the various phases; third, the socio-economic profile of the Afro-Brazilian population in terms of education, health, labor market, housing and property, land ownership, and income and wealth indicators; fourth, the socio-economic struggles of Afro-Brazilians, specifically through labor and the trade union movement, community development activities, and NGOs; finally, Brazil's international economic relations with the global south generally and Africa in particular.

Silvio is a very busy man who works three jobs, including as Director of the Steve Biko Cultural Institute, as professor at a private university, and an economist in a government agency. I don't know how he does it, or even how it is possible to hold different jobs, each of which requires a full-time person. The result is that, according to Veronica, he is always in a hurry, always running, and usually late. And so we waited and waited in front of the offices of the Ministry of Social Services, which, we discovered later, stands opposite his building. At first, we waited on the wrong side, and when we found the right place, we waited even longer. Both of us were beginning to feel a little annoyed and hungry. Each time Veronica called him he was on his way, he was only a few minutes away. In the end, we decided to go to a nearby restaurant where we sat facing the social services building. It was after we had ordered that we saw him walk down the street and Veronica walked out to get him. He apologized for being late. I was more grateful for the passion fruit juice I was drinking than for his apology, although I tried not to show it. We told him we had already ordered food and he decided to do the same and suggested that we go to his office for the interview. As we were eating, his niece dropped in and they left together to go to his office while we waited to settle the bill.

The interview was brilliant and Silvio almost made up for his lateness, except that he only had 45 minutes or so before his next meeting. Veronica had read him some of the questions in the restaurant so by the time we started the interview in his office he was prepared. We decided that in order to save time, Veronica would not translate. But I could follow because the phrases and issues he discussed were quite familiar and he would occasionally use English phrases. He gave a comprehensive overview of Brazil's economic history and suggested several websites where I could get statistical data on the socio-economic indicators, some of which were in English. The more he talked the more animated he became and the more Internet sources he came up with and authors and books he suggested, among them Paixão from Rio de Janeiro, whose work he praised highly.

After the interview, which started at 3:00 p.m. and ended a little before 4:00 p.m., we walked to the Steve Biko Cultural Institute for my last engagement of the day, which turned out to be the best event of the day. I had asked Veronica if I could talk to her English class and she agreed. And as fate would have it, while waiting for Veronica to get her class ready, I ran into one of Natasha's professors! I was standing in the corridor reading the posters on the notice board, or trying to, when this brother, who was an inch

or two taller than me with a fade haircut and a white T-shirt and khaki pants asked me whether I spoke English. When I replied, he asked where I was from and I told him Malawi, and he said he was from the U.S. I asked him where in the U.S. and he said Atlanta, I mentioned that my daughter went to school in Atlanta at Clark Atlanta, and he exclaimed that he taught at Clark Atlanta. He asked my daughter's name and I said Natasha, to which he exclaimed again, saying she was a student in his psychology class, and proceeded to reveal that she hadn't done too well in one class, although she was attentive and enthusiastic—always sat in the front row—but needed to study more. We were both astounded at meeting at the Institute and proceeded to take each other's pictures. He had a camcorder. He later came to Veronica's class and taped part of the session. He said he had first come to Salvador and the Institute as part of an exchange group, but had come by himself this time because he was so impressed the first time.

There were about twenty kids in the classroom. They had written English phrases on the board: "my name is," "I live at," and "my age is," to remind them of what they need to say to introduce themselves to me. Veronica briefly introduced me, all smiles; she clearly loves teaching but probably felt relieved to have a guest teacher today. I followed up her opening remarks by telling them where I was from and where I went to school. I asked them to tell me who they were and their backgrounds—the latter proved too much for their limited English and so they stuck to the phrases on the board; a few revealed their age, mostly the girls. I nodded and muttered some words of acknowledgement as we went around the class with the introductions. The room was filled with laughter and giggles: the students seemed to take great fun in how their classmates pronounced English words.

I told them that I thought it would be best if they asked me questions, which I would try to answer, instead of assuming what they wanted to know. To my great surprise and satisfaction many hands shot up—how different from my students in the U.S., I thought. I took about a dozen questions for the first part: what I like to do?, nature of schools in Africa, the apartheid system in South Africa, did African peoples resist slavery?, slavery in Asia?, where have I worked?, how do I find Brazil?, do I experience and discuss racism?, Africa and the World Cup, and so on. I began talking about my love for reading and history and asked them whether they loved reading and history, to which they responded with laughter, some saying yes as others teased them. One remarked that they were not taught much history of Africa and their people in the schools. They were taught how the Portuguese discovered Brazil as if there were no people living there before them and the only thing mentioned about Africa were the slaves brought here.

I took the opportunity to give a broad overview of the history of Africa as the cradle of humanity, the successive civilizations that developed until the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade in the fifteenth century. I noted, in answer to the question about if there was slavery in Asia, that slavery was a worldwide phenomenon, that slavery had existed in every continent before the fifteenth century, but that the Atlantic slave trade was different because it was racialized, modern, and confined to Africans in order to build modern capitalist economies: stolen people used to build stolen lands; I used the phrase from one of my short stories in my collection, *The Joys of Exile*. For each of the questions, I tried to elaborate on the African realities, the challenges and possibilities of Africa, the complexity and diversity of this vast continent, the second largest in the world and inhabited by more than 900 million people.

The second set of questions centered on affirmative action in the U.S., my time in Salvador, school segregation in the U.S., my experiences as a black professor teaching pre-

dominantly white students, whether Africans suffer from racism in Africa, African perceptions of beauty, whether I was proud of myself, and the role of musicians. The questions were pointed, urgent, and intimate, betraying some anguish, a search for answers, for affirmation by fragile young people anxious about their hopes and dreams. My answers were elaborate, offered support and empathy, sought to tie their struggles to struggles of others in the diaspora, especially the U.S. and in Africa itself. For empowerment, for material development, racial uplift, and social progress, I stressed the importance of affirmative action, the need for them to develop a healthy sense of self-respect, to know and accept who they are, to reject feelings of inferiority. The kids were clearly moved.

At an appropriate interval, I asked them about their musical interests: hip hop, they all screamed, and I asked them to name their favorite artists and a torrent came, Afro-Brazilian hip hop artists I had never heard of. They wrote them down for me. When I asked of African-American hip hop artists, some mentioned a few. At that point, a group of aspiring hip hop singers in the class offered to give me a taste of their musical talents and the class went wild. We watched, laughed, and clapped as five students went in front to perform. It was a touching, charming moment. I took pictures and shook each of the singers' hands as they went back to their seats. We decided to take a group photograph, in which Natasha's professor took part, as well as Veronica and two other teachers from the Institute. The pictures were taken by an exchange student from Stanford University, a major in electrical engineering and Portuguese. It was a great class and the excitement was palpable all around. Veronica was very happy with the way the class had gone.

I arrived at the hotel elated. But my mood soured before I went to bed following a brief telephone conversation with Cassandra in Chicago. She didn't sound too thrilled with the way her job talk and meeting with the Political Science Department at UIC had gone. She said she would give me more details tomorrow after she returned to State College. The thought of remaining in State College sent a shudder through my spine.

July 20, 2006

The day started well but ended miserably. Veronica came to pick me up around 9:30 for our interview with the Director of the Ilê Aiyê, Antônio Carlos "Vovô". It turned out it was the same building I had gone to last Saturday with Abena and Akosua. It is located in the vast neighborhood of Liberdade. We were welcomed warmly by the assistants who took us to the Director's office. Antônio is a tall, dark man who wears long locks and talks with the deliberate emphasis of an actor on a stage, but avoided making too much eye contact. He was sipping rice porridge, as we discovered when we were offered some by his secretary who came in and out a couple of times to bring him other beverages and us coffee. He seemed unhurried and we found that reassuring, although, as Veronica translated, he occasionally signed the paperwork in front of him. I took an immediate liking to him.

There was so much I wanted to learn from him about Ilê Aiyê, its contributions to the community, the struggles for Afro-Brazilian empowerment, and his views on the recently concluded CIAD II. For the sake of time, I had asked Veronica not to give me a verbatim translation but to summarize the main points since we were recording the interview and there would be a verbatim transcript. He gave us a brochure explaining Ilê Aiyê's activities. The organization was established in 1974 based on the principles of Candomblé. As a black community association, Ilê Aiyê quickly established itself as an important center

and agent in the recovery of self-esteem and self-consciousness with the black community in Salvador. It vigorously defended Afro-Brazilian culture and its roots.

It maintains services of social projects, and activities including two schools, Mae Hilda School, which was started in 1988 and named after his mother, whose large portrait hangs in the office, which he pointed out to us, and the Banda Ere Percussion School, established in 1992, which became a full-time training school offering courses in Afro-Brazilian history, language and acting, musical rhythms, singing, dance, and body health as part of efforts to promote productive citizenship and consciousness. In 1995, Ilê Aiyê established the Pedagogical Extension Project with the purpose of systematizing and broadening the educational projects that the organization had been conducting since its creation. The project covers courses about Afro-Brazilian history and culture for teachers, educational supervisors and counselors from public schools. Ilê Aiyê also operates the Ilê Aiyê Technical School to train youngsters from the community for the job market. It offers courses on subjects such shoe, bag, and accessory manufacturing, electrical work, computers, beauty care, dressmaking, cooking and home management, etc. The graduation ceremony we had witnessed last Saturday was for the Technical School.

In addition to the above social projects, Ilê Aiyê operates several cultural projects, including the Black Music Festival, which selects theme songs that will be developed during the year in preparation for Carnival. Songwriters are expected to express their self-esteem and feelings in themes and poetry. Then there is the Black Beauty Night pageant where an Ebony Goddess, an ethnically black belle in typical costumes and habits is selected. The Ilê Aiyê carnival is the height of the cultural calendar. Ilê Aiyê has revolutionized the Bahia carnival. The 120-musician Band Ilê Aiyê has made cameo appearances on the albums of various artists from Brazil itself, the U.S., Cuba, and Africa (Morocco). The success of Ilê Aiyê can be gauged by the fact that not only does it have 3,000 members and has been a leader in the re-Africanization of Bahia, but it recently built the Senzala do Barro Preto Cultural Center, a multi-purpose facility which has a library and a video library, a recording studio, a computer lab, and a large hall, and several offices and other rooms on several floors that can be rented out for special functions.

He emphasized that the carnival is secondary to Ilê Aiyê's social work. There are plans to develop a similar institution in the U.S. People constantly come to study their model. However, he expressed regret that Ilê Aiyê has not been able to establish strong connections with other Latin American countries. He mentioned that they won a prize and went to Ecuador once where they were able to meet people from the region. Every year they pay homage to an African country during carnival, but so far they have not been invited anywhere in Africa.

Ilê Aiyê caters to both men and women through its various social and cultural projects, and to the youth through its schools and educational programs. They are now working with retirees as well. They actively advertise their programs through journals, television, radio, ads and street promotion. Such is their popularity that for one program capped at 300 participants, they get 2,500 applicants. They depend on corporate sponsorship for resources to carry out specific programs and projects. They also rent space for various activities and run boutiques.

As for problems facing the Afro-Brazilian community he stressed they are primarily social, related to racism. He distinguished the role of the black movement before and after Ilê Aiyê. The organization has helped Salvador and the country to realize the existence

of racism. They have helped spread the message of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., to challenge mental slavery, to increase black representation in political spaces, to increase black political power.

On the attitudes of visitors to Ilê Aiyê, he noted that they could be divided into two groups or extremes: first, those who have no clue how many blacks there are in Salvador, or Bahia and Brazil for that matter; second, those who subscribe to the myth of racial democracy. The reality is that Bahian racism is the worst of all in Brazil. Eighty percent of the population is black but all power is in white hands.

His perceptions of Africa were intriguing. He went to Angola in 1983 or 1984 during the height of the civil war, which colored everything. In 1986, he went to Benin during which he briefly visited Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. In Benin, he was struck by the fact that light-skinned *aguda* (returnees from Brazil) did not want anything to do with poor people. As for Africans who come to Brazil, many are children of ambassadors and rich Africans who tend to prefer Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to Salvador, the black city. He lamented that tour guides often spread misinformation about the black community in Salvador, and he was distressed that Ilê Aiyê has not been invited to Africa but many white groups have.

He had a few comments on CIAD II, which, in general, he thought was a good thing. Ilê Aiyê has been pushing for an event like this since 1998. It broke the pattern whereby Africans only come and want to work with white Brazilians. It provided a reality check for the racial problems Brazil faces. However, not enough interactions occurred between the African delegates and the Salvador community. It was an opportunity that was not fully realized and Bahia did not fully show its face. In the end, white people tried to control everything, but something positive came out of it, in so far as black people were involved in CIAD's organization and Gilberto Gil was forced to come out in support of quotas.

He walked us to the door. By then he had become a lot more relaxed and was smiling. He bade us farewell and wished me a successful visit and a safe return home. I was quite impressed by Ilê Aiyê's work and moved by his anguish at how Africans ignore the work of organizations like Ilê Aiyê. I asked if he minded my sharing his remarks with people at the AU and he said I could go ahead, at which point he asked one of his assistants to bring more brochures of Ilê Aiyê's programs and activities.

The interview had lasted one and a half hours and we stood on the veranda of the building waiting for the taxi driver who had brought us there. I had paid him R\$25 but he had no receipt and indicated he would bring one when he returned. In the meantime, we discussed Ilê Aiyê and the neighborhood. Veronica pointed to a three-story white house across the road as the director's residence where some of Ilê Aiyê's programs used to be held, including the Mae Hilda School before the new building was constructed. The place where we were standing had been an empty parking lot.

The driver did not turn up by 11:45 as agreed. Ten minutes later, we decided to walk down the slope to the main road to catch a taxi. Boys were playing football on the road wherever cars were not passing by, small restaurants had seats spilled to the edge of the road, several grocery stores were well patronized. The main road was heavy with traffic and pedestrians and packed with more stores and other business establishments. It was lunch time and school kids were flocking to the road and boarding or exiting buses.

From there to Pelourinho for our next appointment at 12:30 p.m., we passed through a long line of favelas hanging on slopes and mini hills that was reminiscent of Rio and

Caracas. It became quite clear to me that Salvador was as inundated with favelas as those two other cities. We got to Pelourinho on time. Veronica had arranged for us to interview Alyssa at a vegetarian restaurant, which was owned, Alyssa informed us, by a Ghanaian. The owner sat at the cashier's machine throughout the two and a half hours we sat there. Our table was within earshot and he must have enjoyed our rambling conversation, although all he said as we left was that he hoped we had enjoyed ourselves. I believe it was the lunch that gave me my first problem of the day.

Alyssa is a fascinating person, quite voluble and adventurous, although her loudly professed Pan-Africanism has yet to take her to Africa, which I found a little odd. She announced she had almost left to go to Dakar with the Senegalese official delegation that had come on a Senegales Air Force jet. She would have gone but for the newspaper article on CIAD II, she was writing. She recalled that she first came to Salvador in a similarly adventurous manner. After we had eaten our first plates, I thought it was time to begin the interview. I wanted to know what had first brought her to Salvador and Brazil in general, her perceptions of Afro-Brazilians, relations between them and other diasporans like her, her perceptions of race relations in the country, the challenges of building transnational solidarities, and so on.

To listen to her was to be privy to free association, for one thought would trigger another and another until she forgot what the original point was. Fortunately, Veronica didn't have to translate, for Alyssa speaks impeccable English, having grown up in the United States, when her parents migrated from Cuba when she was very young. I asked her about Cuba and how it compared to Brazil and that triggered another rambling discourse on racism in Cuba, African-Cuban relations, why she had decided to leave the U.S. because of the American Cuban embargo. I was interested in hearing about her work, and her community service work, fund raising activities, and consultancy services sounded quite impressive. She is one very busy woman. She is quite critical of Afro-Brazilian organizations for their lack of professionalism, taking to task in particular the Steve Biko Cultural Institute.

She was mildly critical of Ilê Aiyê, although she did not give too many details for her disquiet. She generally finds the state of racism in Salvador a throwback to the U.S. in the 1950s. She is a practiced raconteur, so that even if she loses you; you are captivated by her liveliness, her vivid facial expressions, her endearing smile. She knows she is a very attractive woman and at one point revealed how easily African men take to her, a sister with passion and the features of a mulatta. She is funny, indeed, but I wondered whether it was all a front, for the longer we talked the harder it became to pin her down, to know why she had spent so many years in Salvador, on and off, what made her tick.

By the time we finished talking it was too late to do an impromptu interview of the restaurant owner as Alyssa had suggested at the beginning of lunch. We agreed to meet again on Saturday at the same restaurant for me to talk to the owner as a window into the lives and experiences of Africans in Salvador, and for us to go to an Ilê Aiyê performance in the afternoon which is being staged as part of a Brazilian movie production. I commented as we left the restaurant on how delicious the food was and, with such food, I could easily convert to vegetarianism. I spoke too soon, for that evening I fell ill from apparent food poisoning.

From the restaurant, Veronica and I took a taxi towards Pestana. We stopped by the cybercafé around the corner to check for any messages from Taynar for tomorrow's meetings. She had arranged two telephone interviews; one with Caetano, the librarian on my CIAD II panel, and Alisa. The former was 9:00–10:00 a.m., and the latter at 10:45—

12 noon. I asked Veronica where we could make the calls. She suggested using a computer's VOIP facility. Our disastrous attempt to switch to Vonage at home briefly crossed my mind. She left me in the cybercafé as I tried to catch up on e-mail messages and online papers.

I arrived back to the hotel still feeling full and I decided not to go to the hotel restaurant for dinner. Then my stomach started churning and hurting. I tried to ignore it. By 10:00 p.m. it had gotten worse. I thought maybe hot soup would help settle it. By the time the soup came, I had lost my appetite and started having severe stomach pains. I felt miserable. I called the reception to check if there was a pharmacy in the hotel or nearby. They arranged to order some medicine from the nearby pharmacy, which came around 11:00 p.m. Just before midnight or so, I called Cassandra to tell her about my apparent illness, but more importantly to find out about her UIC interview. She didn't sound too upbeat. So I tried to go to bed with a sick stomach and slipping dreams of Chicago.

July 21, 2006

I hardly slept last night. I woke up every so often in great pain, and whenever I dozed off I had a recurring dream—nightmare was more like it—but I can't recollect now what it was exactly. Bleary-eyed and with a wrenching stomach I got out of bed and took a shower to make myself feel a little better. Then I called Veronica, who, ever-so-conscious of costs, offered to call me back. I told her about how I felt and asked if she could go ahead with the two interviews without me. She agreed and wished me a restful day and quick recovery. There was genuine concern in her voice.

I briefly went to check e-mail and found little of much interest, went back to the room and tried to call Cassandra, but she didn't pick up the phone. An hour or so later we talked and she sounded a lot calmer than she did last night. Her copyedited manuscript is coming today and that will cheer her up, I thought. It sure did, for when we talked later in the evening she was back to her old jovial self. I still wondered about what happened at UIC. It seemed she hadn't expected a tough interview, or she felt caught up in the politics between the three departments and the Dean's office. And we talked about my stomach troubles. I spent the day mostly in the hotel room sleeping and going to the bathroom and watching TV, which was quite depressing because all the news programs were about the random Israeli bombings in Lebanon. I ordered some room service and tried to force myself to eat, with little success, for I didn't have much of an appetite and did not seem to be able to retain whatever I ate. For much of the day I wished I were back in State College. Falling ill in a lonely hotel room in a foreign country whose language I can't even speak was not amusing. This was one possibility I had not factored in for the project.

July 22, 2006

The hotel room was beginning to feel stuffy and suffocating so I was determined to get out. Veronica called to ask how I was feeling and whether I was up to going out to buy books as we had planned. I decided to take her up on it. She said she would come

by in half an hour and we would drop by Taynar's apartment to get another list of recommended books. Also, this would give me a chance to see where Taynar lives and to touch base on how the research has gone thus far. She seemed anxious for us to meet.

Veronica informed me that Taynar had sent us a taxi driver who knows where she lives. He came within five minutes, a friendly brother who could be from anywhere in Malawi. Unfortunately, he didn't speak any English. Taynar's husband met us outside the apartment, a tall muscular man with shrubs of dreadlock hair, a firm handshake, and a friendly demeanor. I greeted him by his father's surname, Munanga; he gently corrected me, mentioning his own two names, as people used to do in my father's generation in Malawi when the custom of calling children by their father's name had not yet taken hold.

Their apartment is on the third floor and walking up the stairs left me slightly out of breath. I knew it wasn't just the stomach ailment. I hadn't exercised in a while, notwithstanding efforts to do some walking from time to time. Taynar was busy in the bedroom, perhaps with the baby, when we got in. She quickly came out when she heard our voices and gave Veronica and me excited kisses on the cheeks. She asked how I was doing, her face grimacing with deep concern. I laughed it off, saying I was probably recovered. It was a premature prognosis.

Taynar and Veronica discussed the list of books and Taynar suggested the place where we could get them. Taynar's husband exchanged a few pleasantries. He opened the curtains to show me the ocean in the distance: there was another block of apartments in front of their apartment building, then the road, beyond which was a thin sliver of beach then the crystal blue waters that were unusually calm. The apartment was awfully small and configured in such an odd way that the two sofas—in bright orange colors—could not even be placed next to each other in any semblance of a regular living room. There was no space even to put a cabinet or stand to hold the TV so it was placed on top of the counter next to the kitchen. From the outside, the building looked deceptively elegant.

We first went to a small, privately owned bookstore in Pelourinho. The two attendants looked everywhere for any of the 25 or so books Taynar recommended from the long list we had collected. Unfortunately, only three could be found in the bookstore, so we decided to go to a much larger bookstore where we had much more luck. I left Veronica to deal with the salespeople as I sat in the reading corner perusing a copy of a book on Abdias do Nascimento's exhibition. It contains all the items shown at the exhibition and short essays by various people commenting on the various phases and aspects of Abdias' life. I had wanted to get a copy the night the exhibition opened, but they had run out of copies in English. I was engrossed in the book when Veronica came and said the books were ready for me to look at and make a final decision as to which ones to buy. In the meantime, the sales people kept plucking new titles from the shelves and showing them to us saying we might find them relevant. Ever so politely and with her permanent smile, Veronica declined the sales pitch.

After leaving the bookstore, we sat in the lovely square nearby to wait for the same taxi driver who had been driving us all morning to take us to another part of Pelourinho. Initially, I thought I could do some shopping, but the main intention was to change some traveler's checks. Strangely, a \$50 check was apparently missing from the envelope, but perhaps I had already cashed it. By the time that was done, I was ready for a drink. Veronica suggested coconut water that would be easy on the stomach.

We sat outside the restaurant watching people come and go across the large square in front of us. Pelourinho has these incredibly lovely squares, many of which have been renovated recently as part of the historical district's restoration. This is one element of Iberian city planning that I find immensely pleasant. It beats the shopping cathedrals of modern life—the mall. As we were sitting there, a chubby white woman stopped to talk. At first, I thought she was being rude and intrusive, but she turned out to be a lot of fun. She said she was a history professor at one of the local universities, a mother of three, and gay. All the children were adopted, two girls both now in college and a teenage boy who did not think he would go to college because he has dyslexia, but is very good with his hands. It was what she teaches that fascinated me. She is a professor of Afro-Brazilian history. She spoke English quite well, but I did not care much for her laughter, which showed tainted teeth and evidence that she never flossed or hadn't been to a dentist for a while. She also volunteered information about a restaurant owned by a middle-aged black man who was regarded as a pillar of the community in this part of town. He had started working at the restaurant at the age of twelve and later bought it and expanded and renovated it. It seemed popular with tourists, you can always spot them, she said, with ill-disguised annoyance.

Suddenly the idea of going shopping petered out. I thought I had tested my stomach long enough. I dreaded the thought of trying to find a public bathroom. I arrived at the hotel feeling buoyant, thinking the worst of the stomach problem—food poisoning or stomach flu, whatever—was over. I went to the restaurant for my first healthy meal in two days. The buffet had a pig theme. There were simmering black pots containing pig meat, pig feet, pig tongue, pig this and pig that. I stuck to two familiar parts of the pig, ignored the rest, and helped myself to some salad and even some dessert; not fruit this time, as I often do, but a slice of coconut cake. It was delicious. For the rest of the afternoon I checked e-mail, read online newspapers, and watched some TV, trying hard to avoid the news dominated by Israel's destructive rage in Lebanon; where was Gaza? The news channels seemed to have forgotten that story.

I decided to order a hamburger for dinner and settled down to watch some forgettable, silly movie. All was well until I lay down to sleep. My stomach pains resumed for the rest of the night. I was reluctant to check the watch. When I finally did, it was after 3:00 a.m. and I was still awake tossing. I was in far worse shape than I thought.

July 23, 2006

The first thing I did when I woke up was to shower and go to the nearest pharmacy armed with my Brazilian Portuguese phrasebook. Clearly, the medicine the hotel had gotten for me was not working. I had three sleepless nights to show for it. As I walked to the pharmacy I frantically flipped through the phrasebook to find the right words for my symptoms—discomfort, stomach pains, occasional headaches. I had found them by the time I got to the pharmacy and held on to the relevant pages for my dear life! Falling sick in a foreign country whose language you do not speak is a medical hazard. And when that country is Brazil, where what are called prescribed drugs in the U.S. can be bought over the counter without a doctor's prescription, that can be deadly. Suppose one picks the wrong medicine, or takes the wrong dosage, or at the wrong intervals? For backup, I would walk around the pharmacy and look for some medicine that looked like stomach related drugs I am familiar with.

The pharmacists, both men, could hardly suppress their laughter at my predicament. At that moment, I too, found it funny. I pointed to the key words of my condition and they exchanged glances, but they were too professional to make my situation worse by asking too many questions I could obviously not understand or respond to. As they looked for the medicine, I quietly surveyed the room and when I saw a bottle that resembled medicine for some common stomach ailments, I grabbed it and showed it to one of them excitedly. He shook his head and made several gestures, which took me a while to interpret. His accompanying words, spoken slowly as if he was talking to a child or an idiot of course meant nothing. Somewhere in the recesses of my memory, I recall that the medicine was for the opposite of my sorry condition. Chastened, I inspected the two packets they had collected for me. One had the relevant word in its Portuguese spelling, that was clearly recognizable on the packet. The other I discovered after some difficulty and surreptitious consultation of my phrasebook mentioned something like "upset stomach." I couldn't find the words for "how many tablets" and "how often" should I take the tablets to ask the two pharmacists. I paid for the two sets of tablets and a bottle of water and left muttering "*mucho obrigado*" while avoiding their bemused expressions. This was proof, if any is needed, that stupidity is a product of degrees of communication!

When I got to the hotel I stopped taking the old medicine and started taking the ones I could vouch for, however limited my linguistic competence. When Veronica called and asked how I was now feeling and I told her about my sleeplessness night she felt very sorry for me and wondered whether she could bring me anything; she went on about how she or William her husband had been caught in similar situations and understood my difficulties. I didn't ask her whether they had been caught in countries where they were linguistically challenged. But she laughed when I told her about my drama at the pharmacy. At that moment, a bright idea flared through my mind: how about if she could read the medicine notes inside the medicine packets. I thought I would be sleek and not tell her that. How about, I said, if she insisted on seeing how I was doing if she dropped by between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. and we could have coffee in the lobby and we could settle the money situation since I am leaving tomorrow. She came around 5:30 p.m. After we had settled business and she had signed the receipt, I discretely brought the medicine packets and she read the relevant sections. It was the right medicine and I had been taking it in the right amounts at the right intervals. I was relieved.

For dinner I had gone to the hotel restaurant and was very careful with what I ate and how much. One of the waiters said he hadn't seen me for a while and was wondering what had happened, whether I had left or was upset with him for having been late in bringing tea that I had asked for. I was astounded by his comment and initially I couldn't tell whether he was joking or not. But something in his demeanor suggested that he was not joking, so I quickly assured him that I thought he was a great guy, very friendly, efficient and a pleasure to talk to since he speaks such good English. He beamed his wide smile and thanked me. The man sitting at the next table overheard and remarked that he found people in Salvador, indeed in Brazil, so friendly. I concurred about Salvador and thought of Rio too.

Before long he invited himself to my table and asked me where I was from, I said Pennsylvania. He said he had once worked in Philadelphia and lived there for about four years. He asked me what I did and what I was doing in Brazil. It turned out he had also worked and lived in Salvador for one-and-a-half years. During that time, he had visited many parts of this vast country and commented on the spectacular physical beauty of the different regions. He was based in Texas, working with Sunoco, the oil company. The

same company had brought him to Salvador, and earlier taken him to Nova Scotia in Canada. I told him I had done my PhD at Dalhousie and he said he had done his at McMaster in Ontario. He asked me whether I had taken American citizenship and I replied not yet; I was waiting for President Bush to leave office, I joked. He did not intend to relinquish a good Canadian passport for an American one, he said. He told the story from his son visiting Europe and noticing American exchange students walking with back packs with the Canadian maple leaf. Americans are often nice people on an individual level but their country's image across the world had taken a precipitous fall because of the government's obnoxious foreign policies, he observed.

At that point, we turned to the current conflagration in Lebanon and Gaza and we both lamented how the U.S. could be the cheerleader for such savagery. He had just arrived earlier this morning and seemed relieved to have someone to talk to. I, too, found it refreshing to be talking in English, and not about my research. When I explained, very briefly, the nature of the research he commented on the strength of African influences in this part of Brazil and relative absence further south. I didn't feel like debating with him so I switched the subject to the presence of the Indian diaspora in Africa, including my home country, Malawi. By then we had told each other our countries of origin. He was from India. We parted hoping to bump into each other again. I told him I am leaving tomorrow.

For the rest of the afternoon I napped or watched TV. Somehow, I couldn't get off the news, the awful images of the destruction of Lebanon. I decided to write a blog, but I was not sure when. At night, I talked to Cassandra at length. She clarified that she had actually enjoyed meeting people in Women's Studies and African American Studies in Chicago, but not those in Political Science and her preference would be not to be in the Political Science department. We were both excited that one day remained before my return. For the first time in several days, I went to bed feeling fine, even if my stomach had not completely stopped acting up from time to time, but it was a far cry from the last three nights.

July 24, 2006

I slept much better, but woke up a little earlier than I would have wished. It was the excitement of finally going home after spending more than five weeks traveling in two different countries, several cities, and meeting numerous people in African diaspora communities. It has been a trip of a lifetime, deeply moving at all times, intellectually stimulating, and culturally enriching. I have learned an awful lot, and developed a much deeper appreciation of the diversity of African diasporas and their complex histories, national trajectories, and transnational possibilities. This is my first field research since my doctoral research more than 25 years ago.

I tried to linger in bed but the temptation to begin packing proved too great, so by 6:15 a.m. I was at it. I was done by the time Veronica called at 8:30 a.m. to confirm my last interview with Taynar herself. We agreed to meet at 9:30, and after Taynar's interview to dash to the mercado to buy some gifts for family and friends. I went for breakfast to fortify myself for the day in case there was no time for lunch, which turned out to be the case. I waited for Veronica until 9:45 a.m. when she turned up to explain that Taynar had changed her mind back and forth whether we should meet at the hotel or her apartment.

At first, it was the hotel, then her apartment, and back again to debating the two venues. Partly it had to do with her son, so I understood. In any case, my incapacitation over the past few days had prevented us from doing the interview a few days earlier.

When we got to the apartment, in the foyer we found the baby with a woman who seemed like a maid, I presumed. The baby was a cute fella with big bright eyes; I played with his chubby cheeks. We found Taynar waiting for us in the apartment. She had parted her big afro in two halves that made her look like a more beautiful Diana Ross in the afro days of *The Supremes*. She seemed quite anxious for the interview, which I found touching. Before we started, I thanked her profusely for everything she had done to arrange the interviews and make my trip the success it was. And I meant every word: she has been extraordinary. She explained it was her pleasure, an honor to be asked by her senior Afro-Brazilian academic sisters who I had first contacted to help me with my work. She revealed some of the difficulties she had encountered including the refusal of a couple of white scholars who work on Afro-Brazilian history to meet with me and the reluctance of the director of CEAQ, which came as an important revelation about his behavior when we met him. This mutual admiration and congratulation lasted nearly fifteen minutes.

When we got to the discussion, I wanted to know about her research and her views on the current state of Afro-Brazilian society and the likely trajectory of the immediate future. She gave a long fascinating account of her academic background, her interest in Afro-Brazilian history and culture ever since she was a kid, her MA at the University of São Paulo with Professor Munanga, and her plans for a PhD in biological anthropology to excavate the connections between ancient Egyptians and the ancient pre-Incan communities of the region, she said. It had a strong Afrocentric thrust, whose full scope I did not get, for I had asked Veronica, in the interests of time, only to summarize the main points. But even that did not seem to work. Discussing her work took half an hour, while attending to her baby in the bedroom, I asked Veronica to tell her that perhaps a more detailed interview should be conducted by Veronica after I had left and I would be sent the transcript. I was confident that by now Veronica had a full grasp of the kinds of follow-up questions she could ask her. Taynar agreed to the arrangement without any display of a particular preference. I thought she was being polite and thanked her.

Then we talked business. I worked out a formula and a figure while she was briefly out of the living room and Veronica communicated it to her. She seemed genuinely overtaken with gratitude. But I was the one who was overwhelmed with her generosity and assistance. Although I would be spending more than I had budgeted on research assistantships in Salvador, it was well worth every penny.

I bade her farewell as she stood to give me a kiss on the cheeks. We dashed to the mercado where I did express shopping. I bought several pairs of necklaces and earrings and spent a little time trying to figure out what kind of clothing I could buy—I joked that I was now a tourist looking to purchase and consume Bahian cultural difference. Veronica suggested white was the special color in Afro-Brazilian culture and so I bought several white dresses, with the vendor who seemed to be the size of Cassandra only too happy to act as a model. The banter and bargaining, which Veronica cheerfully translated, was truly fun. In less than an hour, I was done with my tourist shopping and it was time to dash off to the hotel. I said my farewell to Veronica in the lobby where she kissed me on one cheek. She was choking with emotion. She had told me yesterday that this project had taught her a lot and rekindled her interest in further education. That was quite gratifying to hear and I told her so and asked her to contact me for advice, or when visiting the U.S.

There was no time for lunch, for by the time I finished packing the stuff I had bought it was almost time to leave for the airport. It felt like I had been in Salvador for months, not just a couple of weeks. I thanked the hotel staff who wished me a safe flight and hoped I would come back to their lovely hotel and to Salvador, maybe with your wife next time, one of the men winked. The taxi driver, a black man, spoke little English, but we tried our best to communicate. He was fascinated by the fact that I was an African living in the United States. I told him how much I had enjoyed Salvador.

Checking through the airport was a breeze. It didn't look like there were many flights. But like a law of nature the whiteness of airports reasserted itself. The only black people seemed to be the airport staff and the salespeople in the shops. There were hardly any black passengers on the flight itself. The class and color privileges of travel were even more glaring at the international terminal of the Sao Paulo International Airport where I boarded the flight to Philadelphia. The white Americans and white Brazilians were indistinguishable. Yet, once we land in Philadelphia, I thought to myself, the white Brazilians will suddenly metamorphose into Hispanics, an underprivileged minority deserving redress like the descendants of the enslaved Africans on whose broken backs the American dream was built for others to enjoy. I wonder to what extent the Hispanization of Latin American whites in the United States reflects age-old northern European conceit that southern Europeans are not fully European, living as they do in the dark shadows of Africa and western Asia or the Middle East across the Mediterranean. Regardless, it must be sweet for them to enjoy the privileges of whiteness both at home and in the U.S. together with whatever crumbs might come through affirmative action for minorities.

It was a long wait. I occupied myself with reading and occasionally I walked through the shops. I ended up buying some liquor to give as gifts to friends who drink. I started this habit in the lead up to the 50th birthday party of Valerie, Cassandra's eldest sister, in summer 2004 which we hosted at our house in State College. There were drinks from Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Malawi, Switzerland, Sweden, Britain, Canada, Trinidad, and all the other places I visited months prior to the party. I only wish I had tasted some of it!

The flight from Sao Paulo to Philadelphia was lovely. Well, I missed much of it as I fell asleep almost immediately after we took off. It will take me a while to process what I encountered and experienced in this large, complex country, home to the largest African diaspora in the world. I will have to come back, I resolved as I landed at our puny airport in State College.

2007

Haiti

July 4, 2007

I set the alarm clock for 4:15 a.m. for a 5:00 a.m. pick up to O'Hare Airport to start the new phase of my research on the African Diaspora and my first trip to Haiti; the land of the first modern black republic in the Atlantic world, the land of legendary revolutionary heroism and an emblem of failure, of tyranny and poverty, a sobering harbinger of the triumphs and tragedies of Africa itself.

I woke up an hour earlier, anxious to complete several unfinished tasks: sending out my candidacy statement for the African Studies Association (ASA) presidency, the budget for the History Makers project at UIC, and responding to urgent e-mail messages. Fortunately, all my stuff was already packed. By 5:00 a.m. I was out of the door of the apartment building after kissing Cassandra a rather plaintive goodbye.

The limo came twenty minutes later. Fortunately, I was the only passenger so we did not have to go all over town picking up other passengers. The driver was a friendly, chubby brother with a faint Caribbean accent. We exchanged a few pleasantries as I concentrated on answering e-mail messages—oh, the wonders of modern technology! Of course, these technologies can be oppressive; the obsessive connectedness can be invasive. As liberating as multitasking can be, it robs us of the simple freedom to relax and reflect, the exhilarating joys of laziness and doing nothing, the pleasures of quiet.

There was little traffic on the way to the airport since it was so early as well as the 4th of July. It only took about 20 minutes to get to the airport, half the time it normally takes. The airport was also not as full or busy, so I checked in and went through the stringent security check points within half an hour. All this security at airports makes travel so much less pleasant than it used to be, but it's amazing how we have become accustomed to it, so much for the independence and individuality of Americans—we obediently herd ourselves into long lines and subject ourselves to intrusive checks with hardly a whimper. Of all the countries I have visited, Americans may be among the most conformist, the least rebellious of citizens.

As I was walking to the departure gate, I saw a restaurant where I could sit and have breakfast. I normally don't eat breakfast, but travel can be unpredictable and they don't feed you on domestic flights—oh, I hate pretzels! All they do is give you those miserable pretzels that they dole out with malicious glee and which end up sticking in your teeth. I ordered two eggs over hard, wheat toast, and sausage, and, of course, coffee. Unusual for that time of day, I ate heartily, reading news reports on my Blackberry from my website, *The Zeleza Post*. The site is attracting a lot of interest and more and more people are asking to become bloggers.

One of the pleasures I get at airports is perusing the bookstores, newsstands and buying newspapers and magazines. Since I started subscribing to many of the magazines I like to read, and had the latest copies—*The Economist*, *Time*, *The Nation*, *Harper's*—in my briefcase, I bought *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. I still cannot bring myself to buy

The Chicago Tribune, which I think of as a “local” and not “national” paper; some say it is a conservative paper, but I find most American papers—much of the American media—conservative.

To my eternal surprise, I was checked into business class. The flight was full and, as usual, the passengers were largely white. I may have been one of no more than three “people of color” in the business class cabin. I fell asleep almost immediately after takeoff. I smelled some breakfast being served, but let it pass. I only woke up when the captain announced that we would soon begin our descent into Miami. I quickly went over the newspapers—nothing particularly informative or inspiring: the same old stories of political chicaneries by the incredibly incompetent Bush administration, the carnage in Iraq of course buried deep in the paper, the travails of the housing market, the swings of the stock market, and sports, which I never read except if it’s about a sports figure that fascinates me for political or cultural reasons. They had a story about Serena Williams at Wimbledon, how she played, persevered and won a match with a strained knee.

Miami International Airport was a pain to navigate. We landed in Terminal D. From there we had to go to Terminal A through a long maze of ugly, cavernous corridors for almost half an hour. Apart from the benefits of the walk itself—since walking is the main form of exercise for me lately—it was annoying. I realized my computer bag and briefcase were quite heavy.

I was met with a big surprise at the gate for the Port-au-Prince flight: there was a sea of black faces. Whites stood out as sore thumbs. It was an amazing spectacle, blackness at an airport for an international flight! It was the first exception I had encountered to the whiteness of airports, a pleasant surprise. But it was also quite revealing, an indication of Haiti’s isolation and marginalization in the Americas; its contrived status as a pariah, shunned by white America, feared ever since the Revolution of 1804 that freed the slaves. The other Caribbean islands have now become playgrounds, extended beaches, tourist havens for Euroamerica. If this had been a gate for flights to these other islands, the whiteness of the airport would have reasserted itself as the stubborn law of nature it has become in our world of globalized apartheid. But this was Haiti, proudly and reluctantly, strangely black, proclaiming its blackness loudly. I was moved, pleased, and surprised.

The flight was delayed. Something about the flight attendants who were supposed to be on the flight being stuck on a flight from Puerto Rico; then we were told a storm prevented that flight from landing and it was directed to Fort Lauderdale. I rarely get perturbed by delays, for I bring enough to read, to catch up on my work. This time I also decided to indulge myself with lunch. I would have wished to eat a shrimp scampi dish, but for the garlic—it might not be the best meal talking to customs officials! I settled for a chicken Caesar salad and read my *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

By this time, I could not access e-mail and online services on my Blackberry, and I became anxious. Alas, the anxiety disorder of the hyper-connected! I contacted AT&T (the new Cingular) and in order to sort out the problem I needed to call them on another phone. The trouble-shooting worked and I was soon back on the Internet and could check and read my e-mails. What a relief, what a pity, I thought to myself. I thanked the man whose phone I had used. He was a Haitian school teacher living in Miami who goes to Haiti quite often. He was light-skinned. He stood out. Probably in his early thirties, I latched on to him in case I needed him when we arrived in Port-au-Prince.

We left three hours later than scheduled. I had used those hours well: sent several e-mails once my Blackberry was fixed. I also called Katia Mombrun, my research assistant

in Haiti, to tell her about the flight delay. She sounds so eager, so enthusiastic to work with me. I am grateful to her for helping to get hotel accommodation, which proved more difficult than I and Cassandra thought it would — another indication of Haiti's marginalization from the global tourism industry. I was able to call Katia because I managed to get international dialing placed on the phone when I contacted AT&T to fix the e-mail problem. It had been frustrating when I was in South Africa last week not being able to use the cell phone.

I was put in business class, to my surprise again. I must contact the travel agent who booked the ticket and ask by what fortune an economy ticket was upgraded twice to business class. This time I did not sleep and partook in the indulgences of business-class travel—a glass of water, juice, and a turkey sandwich. Three meals already in a single day, I was feeling pampered! I normally eat one full meal a day. Next to me was a white woman; there were few more whites in the business-class cabin, but Haitian blackness still made its presence felt.

Sitting in the aisle seat, I couldn't clearly see out of the window as the plane began to descend over the mountainous landscape of Port-au-Prince. As we got closer to the airport, the images became clearer, the calm sea surrounding the city, the hills circling it, and the dense buildings and houses covering the hills and the low-lying areas. When we landed, I could see an Air France plane, which seemed to have just landed as well, and a Canadian airline. Otherwise, the runway was bare. As we walked off the plane, a burst of hot humid air hit us. I was reminded of the first time I went to Jamaica and Dar es Salaam. My light safari suit suddenly felt uncomfortable.

The airport was tiny, a little ramshackle even; there was some construction going on as parts were surrounded by construction beams. Inside the terminal, there were long lines of passengers from the two earlier flights. The walls were covered with beautiful paintings, but otherwise the arrivals hall was remarkably bare. Only a couple of commercial signs, both for cell phone companies, broke the monotony. The customs official for the line I was standing did his job quietly and efficiently without saying much. I greeted him in French; he didn't even grunt a response. The baggage claim area was a mess. There were suitcases everywhere and people anxiously looking for their baggage. There were no signs for the baggage claim of the different flights so I walked from one to the next—there were three carousels. Finally, I asked someone who looked like an airport worker, from the badge he was wearing, and he pointed me to the claim area for the "American" flight. My bag was already on the ground, I found out after fruitlessly looking at the bags moving along the belt.

I had agreed with Katia that she would meet me at the airport. She said she would be wearing a black skirt and a white T-shirt. I had suggested she carry a placard with my name, but she didn't seem to get the point I was making. I had told her I would be wearing a black cap. These turned out to be useless identifiers, for the waiting area was so packed I could not make out where she was. I didn't want to show I was now lost. I had been warned by several Haitians I met in Chicago that Port-au-Prince is dangerous, that I needed to be met at the airport by a trustworthy person otherwise I would find myself in trouble, perhaps robbed and worse. All these warnings from the middle-class Haitian diaspora in Chicago were racing through my head as I frantically looked for Katia among the throng of people leaving the arrivals. I discovered an even larger crowd, all lovely black faces, but there was no Katia, nobody waving at me with any recognition, shouting my name. There was no shortage, of course, of taxi drivers offering their services. How to tell a genuine taxi driver from a possible thief, a kidnapper even, my Chicago Haitian interlocutors had warned, was impossible. I took a chance. I asked a man wearing what

looked like a uniform—a yellow shirt with a badge—for a taxi; I had seen several people, including a woman, in similar attire, so I reckoned he was a bona fide taxi driver. He led me to his car, which didn't look like a typical taxi. I chided myself: what was a typical taxi, one with the letters "taxi" emblazoned loudly on the side and flashing on top?

I sat in front of the taxi and we exchanged a few pleasantries in my broken French. He asked where I was from. He didn't seem to know about Malawi but he latched on to the fact that I was from Africa and he remarked, pointing to his skin color, that we looked the same, and I added we were brothers. I felt safe.

By the time we pulled out of the congested airport, it was getting dark. It was around 7:00 p.m. The drive from the airport to the hotel was almost breathtaking in its ruggedness—the roads were narrow, congested, and full of potholes; the streets were lined with kiosks and vendors selling everything imaginable; and the low lying buildings, many unfinished, looked in need of painting. It was so vibrant, so noisy, and so full of energy and life. I marveled at how it reminded of many poorer downtowns—River Road in Nairobi, parts of Dakar, even Limbe in Malawi. But the roads were in a league of their own, winding across the hilly city, nobody seemed to pay attention to the rules, driving in all directions, with no traffic lights in sight. But there was an order in that chaos, for we arrived at the hotel safe and sound. This is the area of the *bourgeoisie*, the driver announced as we came closer to the hotel. By then it was pitch dark. I paid him \$40. An earlier effort to bargain him down had failed. I asked for his card in case I needed to use his services again. We bade each other goodbye, smiles all over our faces, celebrating our newfound brotherhood. So much for the middle-class diaspora's fear of its own people, I reflected as I walked up to the reception.

I was taken to my room on the ground floor of the Villa Creole, established in the 1960s by Haiti's first radiologist and his wife. It was what they designated as a *superior room*. Smiling broadly, the porter switched on the lights, the air conditioner, the TV on a channel with a football match. I gave him a tip. The room looked fine.

After unpacking I decided to go the bar and restaurant. At that time of night, it all looked so inviting, so relaxing. The restaurant was open on one side facing the pool and I sat soaking in the cool evening air. In the distance were silhouettes of the mountains. There were perhaps four or five other customers in the restaurant, all white. The menu was interesting: it proudly announced that the beef and some of the fish were imported. I ordered what seemed like the most local dish—red snapper with banana and rice. It was quite delicious.

When I retired to the room, I switched on the TV, searching for an English-language channel. I should have known, all the American commercial stations were available: CNN, CBS, NBC, Fox, HBO, even the Weather Channel. So much for travel! Instead of watching TV, I decided to start reading the proofs of my forthcoming two-volume collection on violent conflicts in Africa, *The Roots of African Conflicts* (Volume 1) and *The Resolution of African Conflicts* (Volume 2) which had been sent the day before. By the time I finished reading my introductory chapter to Volume I, I was totally beat. It had been a long, fascinating day, my first day in the land of L'Ouverture. I can't wait for tomorrow.

July 5, 2007

I had a good night's sleep; the tiredness probably helped. I had a leisurely morning. I told Katia to come at 11:00 a.m., although she had wanted to come earlier, at 8:00. I took

a nice long shower, shaved and cut my hair. A little before 11:00 I went to the reception to put my valuables in a safety-deposit box and waited for Katia.

I recognized her the moment she entered the semi-open reception area. She had told me she wore glasses and was a little heavy, which she was. She also had a shy smile. We greeted warmly and sat in the lobby to discuss the project. She seemed to have done some research on me on the Internet for she seemed to know quite a bit about my background. I was impressed. She had not yet contacted potential people to interview because she was waiting for my arrival. For today, we decided she would show me around the city. She suggested we walk to the main road from the hotel. I welcomed the opportunity to do some exercise and take in the surroundings of the Villa in a more leisurely fashion.

It was beautiful: the Villa was perched on high ground surrounded by trees, and a little stream. Across the street, down the road, and behind the high walled fences were what I surmised to be houses of the bourgeoisie the taxi driver had told me about, and other hotels. At the junction of the road were the usual vendors selling curios and, most fascinating of all, as I discovered in the course of the day, artwork—mostly paintings. Paintings seemed to be everywhere; at the hotel there are these incredibly beautiful paintings overlooking the restaurant and the bar, and there are paintings being sold at almost every corner where vendors are gathered, colorful paintings of every size and shape, including those of some quality.

The sidewalks were packed with people, the streets congested with cars and what are called “tap tap” minibuses and trucks retrofitted to carry, or rather pack in, passengers. I told Katia that I was feeling a little hungry and suggested that we stop by a restaurant to eat. She called a friend who works at a restaurant and who knows Pétienville well. As it happened, the friend was nearby in a car with her husband and an older gentleman who was driving them. When they saw us, she called out Katia’s name. We got into the vehicle and we were dropped off at the restaurant. Katia’s friend served us. It was a lovely restaurant, on two floors. It opened to the outside in some parts, and it was filled, tastefully and sparingly, with indoor plants, a waterfall, and fish tanks. We first sat in the lounge by the bar before we were ushered into the restaurant on the first floor by the small waterfall. I ordered fish. It was the most delicious fish I have eaten in a while. Katia ordered salad. She said she was on a diet.

Katia is the young sister of Nixon Camilien, who is doing his PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago. There are two siblings on her mother’s side of the family. But on her father’s side, she said there are many—40, she said jokingly. She lives with her mother, while her father lives in the countryside. I didn’t ask whether her parents are still married, but at one point, she mentioned she has a younger brother on her father’s side. She is studying at one of the local universities, majoring in business. She has two months to go before completion. She is not exactly sure whether she would like to go to graduate school, but she does want a job as soon as she is done. She seems very bright and her English is reasonably good. I told her I would try my miserable French on her from time to time.

She is obviously a proud Haitian woman, rather unhappy with the way Haiti is portrayed in the media, and how Haitians are treated even “next door” in the Dominican Republic, which she has visited. In fact, it is the only country she has visited outside Haiti. Haitians are always portrayed as poor and ignorant, she said. I empathized by noting how similarly stereotypical are portrayals of Africans. She had no qualms that Haitians are Africans and expressed her admiration for Cuba and Castro, mentioning how popular and efficient are Haitian doctors trained in Cuba compared to those trained in Haiti itself or elsewhere.

T-shirts bearing Ché Guevara's face are very popular, she noted. She would like to visit Cuba, where many Haitians work, and Jamaica. The U.S. was too difficult to get to because of visa restrictions. She recalled that one of her brothers, the first child of her father, was thrown overboard and died while attempting the trip to the U.S. Her face looked sad when she mentioned that, but quickly recovered with a smile.

After lunch, we continued walking through Pétionville and went past her old high school. The streets and sidewalks seemed to get more congested the further we walked. The drainage was poor in parts, but didn't smell. We stopped by an art gallery claiming to hold the largest collection of Haitian art. It was truly a feast to behold; many of them were exquisite paintings. I was particularly impressed by the semi-abstract paintings and gripped by a painting of slaves arriving and carrying goods at the coast. It was heart-wrenching in the defiant pain and humanity of the enslaved Africans. We agreed we would return when we had more time.

Then we walked down the street to what appeared to be the station for tap taps and an open market. It was a sea of tap taps of all colors and sizes and people. It was sweltering hot. Thankfully, we found a large tap tap that was cool inside. We drove past the side road to the Villa, winding through the edges of one mountain toward the city center. In the valley below were houses packed like sardines, and on the lower levels of the hills were houses piled on top of each other much like those I had seen in Caracas, Rio, and Salvador, but without some of their wretchedness. Higher up in the hills were scattered the sumptuous mansions of the bourgeoisie. All along the road, office buildings and houses were hidden behind high concrete walls. Some belonged to the UN contingent that was brought to keep the peace after President Aristide was overthrown, with American and French connivance, for the second time. There are UN vehicles everywhere—mostly 4x4s. Incidentally, a group of Haitian diasporans in Chicago whom I had met a few weeks ago, as I was planning this trip, warned me not to mention the fact that I had met President Aristide in Pretoria last year and that I occasionally correspond with his wife, Mildred. This was information I had volunteered thinking it would establish my interest in the country's current political situation. They all said Aristide was unpopular in Haiti. Nixon indicated Aristide had been a great disappointment and was either involved in or kept quiet about the reign of terror and violence that gripped Haiti toward the end of his reign.

I had expected the city center to be a little more imposing than the makeshift and crowded buildings we had walked by and driven through. It was not to be. The only distinguishing feature was the rather imposing white Presidential Palace, the square, and the abandoned tower. Policemen were milling around the boulevard adjacent to the Palace while the square, comprised of a concrete garden with statues of Henri Christophe, one of Haiti's early leaders, and a plaque of the 1801 Constitution, was filled with young men and a few couples doting on each other on the benches and vendors plying cold drinks. I bought a bottle of cold water. I noticed those who couldn't afford a whole bottle bought small packets of water.

The journey back to the hotel was less interesting. On our way to the city center in the tap tap, we had been entertained by a vendor selling his wares—medicines, soap, and gels. Katia occasionally translated and explained that vendors in tap taps are quite common. This was the informal economy on wheels! The young man was quite funny and engaging. But on the way back to the hotel, it was mostly quiet. The young conductor, no more than 14 years old, didn't even speak when asking for the fare, he just pointed at you. I paid 20 gourdes for the two of us.

By the time we got back to the Villa, I was feeling extremely hot and dehydrated. We both ordered cold water and began planning events for the next few days. We agreed to

visit museums tomorrow and Katia contacted a potential driver and made several appointments with artists. As luck would have it, we were sitting in the bar area when one of Haiti's renowned musicians—a diva, Katia called her fondly—Emeline Michel, walked in. I was the first to see her, for I was facing the bar counter where she sat to order coffee. Even from a distance, there was something fascinating and enticing about her—she had an effortless poise. When I left Katia to bring the file containing correspondence with Prof. Renate Schneider who had suggested people I could talk to, Katia managed to go and talk to Emeline.

I was introduced to her and she expressed interest in being interviewed next Monday. She was extremely pretty and charming. Katia told me she would bring me her CDs tomorrow. I felt silly that I had never heard of her. I looked forward to interviewing her. She is staying at the Villa. She regretted that she couldn't talk too long with me because she was rushing to the studio. They keep her on a tight schedule, she complained with a smile of endearing self-satisfaction. Katia left soon after I returned to my room and I posted two new blogs on my website: one by Wandia Njoya a brilliant, former PhD student at Penn State who has returned to Kenya, and one by William Gumede, the renowned South African journalist and public intellectual.

I spent the rest of the evening listening to the 5:30 news on NBC that I usually listen to when I am at home, then went to dinner where there were a few more customers than last night, including two black couples. A band was playing Haitian music by the pool under a tree. How predictably fascinating! Before going to bed, it was back to the proofs of the *Conflicts* book. And writing today's events.

July 6, 2007

Katia came with the driver she had promised. They were about half an hour late. We had agreed to meet at 9:00 a.m. I had arranged for an 8:30 a.m. wake-up call with the hotel reception last night, but none came. I got up at 8:30 a.m. and scrambled to get ready in ten minutes, which I did. When Katia and the driver hadn't turned up by 9:05 a.m., I returned to the room.

The driver wanted to be paid \$60 per day, plus gas. We settled on \$40 per day plus one gallon of gas, which I was told was an additional \$5. I thought the matter was settled. I was wrong. We agreed the day would be spent visiting museums and important historical sites in Port-au-Prince. It promised to be an exciting day. It ended up being a little disappointing, beginning with the vehicle for which I was expected to pay so much money for. It was a dilapidated pickup truck with room for the driver and one other person, but all three of us squeezed in, which was a little challenging and the driver had to change gears every so often given the narrowness, congestion, and undulating nature of the roads in this hilly city. But we all took it in good humor and I didn't mind.

The driver and I managed to introduce each other in my broken French, which amused him immensely. He is a policeman and has two children, both boys. He proudly showed me his police badge, and joked that we were safe and secure with him as our driver. Katia added that he worked during the night. He seemed quite pleasant, was about my height with a shaved head. I noticed a little scar running above his left eyelid.

As we drove to the national museum downtown, I could see the city even more clearly than I could yesterday on the tap tap. The mountains were green but bare of trees while the neighborhoods we drove through were hidden by trees and concrete walls. There was a picturesque charm to the layout of the city, almost like Kampala with its multitude of hills, or even Blantyre, except Port-au-Prince seems more haphazard, grittier, more crowded.

The Musée du Pantheon National Haitien was quite impressive. Well-built, tastefully decorated, and exquisitely laid out, it tells the national story. It was divided into two parts, the historical exhibit containing the memorabilia of the founding fathers of the nation, and the permanent art exhibit. As you enter, you are struck by the polished marble of the tombs containing the symbolic remains of the founding fathers. The walls, on top of which are the names of other heroes, are made of white granite and the floors are also made of granite. It was cool, silent, somber, uplifting. The historical exhibit is divided into seven periods, each commemorated by giant frescoes, and for the later periods, pictures, together with a few material objects belonging to the period or persons being featured. The young woman who took us on a guided tour was obviously well-versed in the history of her country and quite proud of it. She was fascinated that I was from Africa and later peppered me with questions about African culture.

The first area featured the Indian period, followed by the Spanish period, characterized by incredible brutality and the genocide of the native peoples. Then came the slave period when Africans were brought, starting in 1503. The chains and other memorabilia of slavery combined with the giant depictions of slave life made for an extremely moving portrayal of the brutalities of the slave trade and slavery. This was followed by a heroic revolutionary period, the movement for emancipation organized by Toussaint L'Ouverture who proclaimed the freedom of the slaves in 1793. He was succeeded when he died in 1803 by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Alexander Pétion, who led the country to its independence in 1804, making it the first black republic in the modern Americas.

The post-revolutionary period was characterized by political dissensions, in which Haiti was split in two, the Republic, ruled by Pétion and the Kingdom, rule by Christophe. Christophe was a key architect of Pan-Americanism and played a significant role in inspiring independence struggles in the Americas. In 1822 began the 21-year reign of President Jean-Pierre Boyer, who not only united the two divided parts of Haiti but also the whole island, including the Dominican Republic. This marked the period of the second empire that lasted until the turn of the century. The final, contemporary period began with the American occupation in 1915, which lasted until 1934 and was preceded and followed by a succession of rulers culminating in Papa Doc Duvalier's dictatorship.

At the end of the exhibit were representations or photographs of all Haiti's rulers beginning with the last Indian rulers of pre-Columbian Haiti. It was a great short lesson in the history of Haiti, which the guide, a short woman with a twinkling smile, told with great relish. The art exhibit was equally impressive. Haiti may be materially poor, but its artistic legacy is immensely rich, judging by the incredible paintings on display. The exhibit changes from time to time, the guide explained.

For a brief moment while we were in the art gallery the lights went off. The same thing happened at the hotel last night. I gather blackouts are quite common. Katia and the guide switched on their cell phones for a little light, but thankfully, the lights came on before long. That is when the guide started asking me about African culture: is it true

that all African men are polygamous?, that if a man visits a friend, the friend is allowed to sleep with the wife as a sign of hospitality? I was stunned and amused. Initially I tried to laugh it off but realized she was dead serious and was anxious for answers. Did I have several wives? I explained as best as I could the diversity, complexity of African cultures, and gender relations including marriage and sexual relations. As we talked, they all said that in Haiti it's common for men to have multiple relations even if they have one legal wife. Clearly, there are a lot of cultural stereotypes about Africa, a deep hunger among Haitians to know more about the continent of their ancestors, as I was to find out later during the day.

From the national museum, we went to the Department and Museum of Ethnography at the State University of Haiti. That is when my shock started. The university looked rundown. It is unforgivable to let such an important national institution be in such a state of disrepair. How can these countries really develop if they do not seriously invest in their institutions of higher learning? The other part of the university is in no better shape: the *Ecole Nationale des Arts d'Haiti*, where we found a group of students outside learning drumming; the School of Law and Economic Sciences; and the buildings we walked or drove past, the National Sciences, and the medical school. They were all crying out for more than a coat of paint. We made several appointments for next week to interview some of the academics. In the *Ecole Superior*, we met a professor of philosophy who knew Salikoko Mufwene, the renowned Congolese linguist at the University of Chicago and he was intrigued by the fact that I knew him.

The *Ecole Superior* is located downtown near the Presidential Palace. From there we went to the Ministry of Public Health to meet one of Katia's brothers who she said would be good for us to interview because he is very well informed and well connected. It was at the ministry that my misgivings about the driver began to be confirmed. At the museum, he had engaged in what looked like a quarrel with the woman attendant. He got into a similar quarrel at the entrance to the ministry. I didn't know the reason until we came out of the building. Katia's brother was friendly. He shared the windowless office with three other people, an economist, as I later found out, and a secretary.

There was also a German consultant who seemed anxious to talk to me when he discovered I was from Southern Africa and lived in the U.S. He had been to Madagascar, and was in Haiti for two weeks on a technical mission from the European Commission. He talked of how unsafe Haiti was, although the situation was seemingly improving. He had two more weeks before returning to Germany. Katia's brother was on and off the phone, so that we actually didn't talk to him much. He agreed to meet us tomorrow. Katia explained we would meet him at his house because he had difficulties traveling after he had broken one of his legs.

It was when we were leaving the building that I realized the driver had a gun. That's what the quarrels with the attendant had been all about. They had asked him to leave his concealed gun behind. I decided there and then to get rid of him. His behavior later in the day only confirmed I had the right hunch.

From the ministry we drove to a private university, called the University of Modern Sciences. My shock at the condition of the buildings turned into numbness. The buildings were not yet completed but were filled with students taking classes! It was still under construction with no windows and no doors. It was a four-story building. How could this be? Katia had called one of the instructors, a pleasant young man in his late twenties or early thirties, to meet us briefly and help arrange for some interviews. We hadn't planned

to stay long, but then the instructor introduced me to two of his colleagues. One colleague took us to one of the classrooms for medical or nursing classes to see a patient chart. There were medical beds, an IV, and it smelled of medicine. They repeated the same questions as the guide at the national museum about polygamy and wife sharing, etc.

Since they were academics, I tried to explain in my broken French, aided by Katia's translation, the complex dynamics of African cultures, and I took the opportunity to ask about Haitian society and culture. It was an informative discussion. They even invited me to a conference next month but I informed them I would be in Cuba then. Briefly, the President of the university joined us. We arranged to interview him tomorrow afternoon. As we left the university I was flabbergasted by the physical conditions of this so-called university, but moved by the obvious hunger for education that its very existence represented. The students, mostly young men, were desperate enough for education that they paid to learn in an unfinished, windowless, and doorless building. It is a tragedy for the state to allow such sub-standard facilities. It reminded me of the primary school in Ntcheu, my late mother's home, where our family supports needy students.

When we got back to the hotel it was nearly 4:00 p.m. and I wanted to work on my proofs and other things, but I thought it would be a good idea to invite Katia and the driver for a drink, to assess the day and plan for tomorrow. I left them briefly to go to the bathroom—one challenge of traveling in unknown places is to know where and when to go to the bathroom. When I returned I could see the anxiety on Katia's face. With great reluctance, as the driver smiled awkwardly beside her while avoiding my gaze, she told me that the 200 gourdes I had given her for the day's gas was not enough, according to the driver—he wanted double that. I gave her a warm smile and gave her the extra money. She looked upset and said something to him in Creole. I acted as if nothing bothered me as I walked them out of the hotel and bade them farewell. I even shook his hand. Later in the evening I called Katia, we would find another alternative means of transport. She seemed to understand.

July 7, 2007

Katia came at 9:30 a.m. as agreed last night. Today is the day of our first formal interviews. We have two arranged, one with her brother, and one with the President and founder of the private university that we visited yesterday. I was excited.

My excitement was dampened when it became clear that it would not be possible to get a taxi to take us around at a reasonable price. We asked the reception to help us get a taxi. The cheapest would cost \$80! Then we called the driver who had brought me from the airport—\$60! We decided to take a tap tap. The day turned out to be a series of mini-adventures on tap taps. In all we took five of them and one taxi.

The first tap tap we took from Pétionville up the hill to where Katia's brother lived. We squeezed onto the wooden benches. This being a market day, many of the passengers were loaded with baskets and bags of food; the woman sitting opposite me had a live chicken on her lap. She wasn't in the least perturbed as she proceeded to chew her cheese and suck on a frozen drink in a plastic packet. The woman next to her, who had brought several carton boxes, was sweating profusely and had a look of suppressed agitation. The traffic was extremely heavy and we crawled up the mountain road. The traffic in the

opposite direction hardly moved. I was squatting next to an elderly gentleman who was perched uncomfortably by the edge of the seat facing outside. Thankfully, the tap tap moved slowly. Occasionally, however, we were jerked up and down and sideways as we hit bumps and potholes, which were in abundance.

The second tap tap we took was from Katia's brother's place down the hill. This time we were lucky. We sat in front and could take in the spectacular views as we descended the hill. The city is even more mountainous than I had thought and seen, and the hills are occupied with sumptuous mansions, modest houses and some shanties. The sights were breathtaking; only the road was a jarring distraction against the picturesque scenes that lay before us in all directions as we made our way to the valley below. The cool mountain air was also a welcome respite from the heat wave below.

The wonderful reverie ended as soon as we came down and had to catch another tap tap to the university. We caught a mini-bus that was so packed that people sat in the open spaces between the aisles, one buttock each on either side. The man next to me was wearing a black suit and a tie. He had a small Bible, one of the Gideon-looking Bibles, and a loudspeaker: he was a preacher, I surmised. He even wore a permanent smile as if to confirm that he was in happy communion with higher powers. On the previous tap tap, as we got down, a man in a light-green suit and a woman and two children in their Saturday best had boarded. Katia said they were Seventh Day Adventists. When I asked her the religious distribution among the population, she noted three major groups—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Voodoo. Any discomfort we may have felt on the tap tap was relieved by a salesman who had a particularly wicked sense of humor, judging by the laughter that greeted his merchandizing antics. He failed to sell any soap and shampoos, but sold many candy bars.

By the time we got downtown, we were running late and decided to take a taxi to the university. It was a battered vehicle—a testament to the longevity of cars in a poor country—which would otherwise have been discarded long ago in a more affluent country. Except for the shiny 4x4s, driven by the elites and expatriates, one sees cars which elsewhere belong to scrap heaps, puffing their way along the congested streets; many wear their panel beating and aversion to paint loudly on their creaking bodies and loose bumpers. From the university we decided to walk to the main road to catch a tap tap back to Pétionville. My eagerness to walk soon turned into distaste as we walked along streets strewn with piles of rotten garbage, including mounds of plastic bottles, containers, and bags, some floating in stench of still, dark, smelly sewers of water.

The final tap tap was the most uncomfortable. Not only was it congested with a few women sitting on each other's laps and bags taking over leg space, the windows were so narrow and covered in wire mesh that you could hardly see outside. It looked like one of those notorious police vans that carry prisoners in Malawi and Kenya. There was an embarrassing sadness on Katia's face. Both of us heaved with relief as we jumped out at the junction leading to the Villa.

The transportation mini-adventures, if such a mundane activity that tens of thousands of Haitians undertake every day can be called such, accompanied what was otherwise a rather successful day. The conversation with Camilien Eduer Hyppolite, Katia's other brother, was superb. He gave me an overview on the development of the Haitian economy, tracing its history from the days of slavery when plantation agriculture dominated, to the present. He noted this is a highly underdeveloped economy characterized by high levels of unemployment, corruption, and low levels of productivity. Seventy-five percent of the

people are unemployed or live on less than \$1 a day. Foreign aid accounts for 69% of the budget but it is not useful for development because of high levels of external leakage—the aid often finds its way out of the country.

He identified several obstacles to Haitian development. There has never been an agricultural revolution; the country has a poor manufacturing base; production is dominated by consumer goods; there are low levels of investment and lack of capital; and poor infrastructure and insecurity that discourage foreign investment and the growth of tourism. In this context, he noted, it is important to understand and underscore the important role played by the Haitian diaspora. Haitian workers in foreign countries send home more than \$1 billion a year and these remittances play a far greater role than foreign aid. He called the diaspora the motor of Haitian development. However, there is need for more targeted partnership between the diaspora and the state to channel diaspora remittances and investments more effectively. The government is trying to promote such cooperation.

The lopsided economic system is created and sustained by pronounced social hierarchies and inequalities. Social divisions are indeed deep. They are based largely on class, to a smaller extent color, and they reflect rural and urban divides. You can tell people's social background from their names.

As for the position of Haiti in the Caribbean, he argued, the connections between Haiti and the other islands are historically deep, but complicated. They have involved migrations, organization of festivals, and student exchanges. Politically, Haiti's relations with other Caribbean islands have been characterized by both cooperation and marginality. Relations soured after the ousting of President Aristide. Now they are improving—President Preval was invited to attend a meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Barbados recently.

Finally, he discussed linkages between Haiti and Africa. He noted that Africans are thought of as brothers and sisters. But we are not as well connected and there is a need to develop closer relations. More Haitians would love to visit Africa and many artists are interested in promoting Africa and try to do so in their work. African cultural practices are evident in Haitian music and dance. He was aware that some Africans do visit and live in Haiti, mostly those from the Francophone countries. He noted jokingly that they came by plane while Haitians came by boat.

I found Camilien quite sharp, articulate, and animated. We sat in the living room of his rented bungalow perched overlooking hills and valleys across the road. He lives alone. A computer sat on a small table beside me, with a TV in the middle against the wall. When we came in, he had the radio on. He welcomed us warmly. I was panting and out of breath as we had to walk three quarters of a mile up the hill from where we had disembarked from the tap tap. The views from the front door were spectacular; the construction of the house itself left a lot to be desired. And when I went to the bathroom, there was no water.

The visit at the private university was a little shorter. We waited an hour outside the unfinished university building and watched as students left. There were classes on Saturdays and even Sundays, Katia explained. This time I saw a lot more female students than I had seen yesterday. Katia said the numbers of male and female students in Haitian universities were probably equal now; previously few women went to university. We had been in the yard half an hour when a cleaner started sweeping the dusty gravel; it seemed such a pointless exercise to me. He could simply pick up the empty water bottles and packets that littered the yard. He dumped the waste he collected over the wall! In the meantime, we watched a few cars come and go; a couple had to be pushed to start.

As we waited, Katia talked more about her personal background. Her father was nearly 80 years old and had been a high official—did she say minister?—in Papa Doc Duvalier's government. When you mention his name people assume you are rich, she said. That is why she preferred to use the name Mombrun, unlike her brother Nixon at UIC. She didn't care for the hassle of being what she was not. She talked about her half-sisters in the U.S., one in Washington, D.C., and the other in Miami; the challenges Haitian women face and their struggles for empowerment.

By the time the President of the university was ready to see us, it was 4:30 p.m. He had expected us at 3:00 p.m. (although no specific time had actually been set, he said 3:00–4:00 p.m.; we came at 3:30 p.m.). Because of the delay, I asked Katia to proceed with the interview without providing immediate translation. The President, Monsieur Michel Dossous was accompanied by one of his administrators and professors Faverdieu Jean Brunel. I wanted to know about the development and state of education in Haiti. As the two talked, I could make out some of the things they were saying, about the poor state of education at all levels from primary to university, lack of facilities and trained teachers, problems exacerbated by desertion into better paying sectors, and the massive brain drain of Haiti's professionals. Haiti's literacy levels were abysmal, at a little over 50%, it was well below the average rates for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Despite all these challenges, Haitians were hungry for education and the private sector was doing its best to step in where the public sector has failed to deliver. Public expenditures on education have increased since the 1990s, a literacy campaign was launched, and advances have been made. But the state has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide free public education. In fact, more than three-quarters of all primary and secondary schools are private, managed by entrepreneurs, communities, religious bodies, and NGOs. He spoke passionately about his university, his ambitions for it, and his hopes to train a new generation of Haitians who would take charge of their country's development. I was curious about the coverage Africa is given in Haitian schools, what are the dominant perceptions of Africa among educators and students, and what kinds of exchanges exist between Haitian and African institutions. On all these, unfortunately, a lot more could be done. The Haitian educational system was rooted in the French system, and when it came to the outside world, it was oriented more to the knowledge of the rich countries than the developing world. Africa was particularly under-appreciated.

Both Dossous and Brunel were highly animated. As they talked, they would look at me as they stressed a particular point as if seeking my immediate reaction. Dossous is light-skinned with a forceful but friendly demeanor. Brunel sported a goatee and smiled easily. They asked me to return and talk to students once the exam season is finished. I agreed and thanked them.

The evening was spent quietly. I went to the restaurant after taking a bath—it had been a long sweaty day on the tap taps—to eat alone as usual. There were four other lonely eaters, all white. The only people sitting together were two black women, and one of the women's teenage sons. You couldn't help overhearing their conversation. One of the women, the mother, was clearly part of the Haitian diaspora, for she spoke to the waiter in Creole. Both women tried hard to answer the teenager's ignorant questions about Haiti—the mother more particularly than the other woman who seemed a lot more informed and less judgmental—that Creole is a language in its own right, for example; and about the spirituality of Voodoo. Thankfully, when the teenager started talking about his braces I had finished my meal. From the gist of their conversation, it appeared they were Canadian.

I managed to talk to both Natasha and her first-cousin Angela. Both sounded very excited to be with each other. Angela arrived late this morning from Canada on her first visit to the U.S. I sent Natasha a text message before I called her saying how wonderful it was for them to be together and how proud Moza—Angela's father—and I were of both of them, our two lovely girls. Cassandra called me when I had already gone to bed. She told me about her day at the African-Caribbean festival, but noticing I was sounding sleepy, we agreed to talk more tomorrow.

July 8, 2007

I had anticipated spending part of the day at the hotel to interview a musician at 11:00 a.m. and meet with Professor Renate Schneider at 1:00 p.m. Katia called at 9:00 a.m. for a slight change of plans. The musician wanted us to meet somewhere else; actually, there were supposed to be two musicians. Katia came to pick me up a little after 10:00 a.m. and we went to a place called Eclipse, a kind of bed and breakfast alongside one of Port-au-Prince's main boulevards—two lanes each way—on which the Canadian embassy is located.

We arrived at the Eclipse around 11:00 a.m. There was a bar and dining tables. The music blared and on top of the orange-colored walls, neon light flickered. Katia said this was the first time she had come here; such places had a bad reputation. Two bartenders in tight black pants and white shirts, with badges dangling, asked us on two separate occasions what we wanted to get. Katia ordered a soda, I asked for water.

The musician sauntered in several minutes later. He was a skinny young man, wearing tight brown pants and a blue short-sleeved shirt made of crumpled materials, and a white beaded necklace. He flashed a shy smile, wondering if we were the people he had come to meet. Katia nodded with recognition and I shook his hand. Katia and I stole glances at each other, wondering where we were going to talk to him, as the bar was too loud to talk, let alone record an interview. We made for a table farther from the loudspeakers, but it was adjacent to a fan that made its own disturbing noises. We asked if the music could be turned down a little, to no avail. The other customers were clearly enjoying the music, groups of them clustered at two tables and happily guzzling their beers. The musician ordered a beer and explained his colleague couldn't make it. Katia wanted me not to drink my water since it was not bottled. I pushed the glass aside.

The musician's name was Brulant Odil. We asked him about his musical background and influences. He said he had been playing music since the age of ten, and professionally for three years. He plays mambo, salsa, jazz, reggae, soul, and some rap as well. His main influences are Mexican music, a musician whose name I couldn't hear properly, as well as African-American gospel and R&B. Among Haitian musicians, his greatest influence is the bassist, Eva Abell.

Despite the noisy background, listening to him was interesting and informative. While he noted musical exchanges between Haiti with other Caribbean islands and the U.S., he did not see much familiarity or connection between Haitian and Afro-Latin music. He noted briefly the influence of the Haitian diaspora in exporting Haitian music and importing other music into Haiti. On African musical influences and connections he observed that African influences are strong in Voodoo-derived music and less so in Kompa.

Some musicians are attracted to African music as a vehicle for talking about freedom. But there are not many direct contemporary connections between Haitian and African musicians. Voodoo musicians do go to Africa where they find their music is better appreciated. He would like to go to Africa one day for the same reason, to experience the appreciation and hospitality he has heard about. He likes the arrangements and harmony of African music.

Finally, he discussed the commercial aspects of Haitian music, noting that much of the music is produced and marketed through the informal economy. Currently, no major commercial company controls the Haitian musical industry. I would have asked him more questions if the surroundings were more auspicious. After we left Eclipse, I asked Katia what she thought of Brulant. She found him rather inexperienced and not as knowledgeable. She revealed that she used to have musical ambitions and she can play the guitar.

Fortunately, the meeting with Renate Schneider was at the Villa. We returned 20 minutes or so before 1:00 p.m. I left Katia in the lobby as I took the tape recorder to charge. By the time I returned a quarter of an hour later, Renate had arrived and she stood up to greet me, her arms stretched ready for an embrace. I shook her hand. A short, slightly stocky, bespectacled woman, she smiled as if she was meeting an old friend. We had exchanged a few e-mails and I was looking forward to meeting her and getting contacts of people to meet and interview.

I invited them to lunch. Hardly had we sat down when she bombarded me with questions about my impressions of Haiti. I observed a little guardedly that it was a fascinating and complex country. I wanted to know more about her. Before coming here four years ago, she had been at the University of Chicago Medical School. Originally from Germany, she has two daughters in the U.S., one in Chicago and another in Portland. She visits the U.S. twice a year.

She came to Haiti as a volunteer at a rural Catholic university which seeks to provide educational opportunities to the rural people who tend to be ignored. The university focuses on agronomy, veterinary medicine, and management. Despite its noble mission, it has proved extremely difficult to raise money for it: potential donors are more interested in dealing with manifestations of contemporary poverty than investing in education for the long-term. When the funds for her work at the university ran out, she got a job with the Health Ministry to supplement her income. Bubbly and spirited, she clearly likes Haiti and is committed to the university. She had several interesting observations of Haiti, echoing my point about its complexities. For example, that Haiti is not as violent and as unsafe as it is often portrayed, and there is a much higher level of civility here in the way people talk to one another than in the U.S., she said. Yet, people are prone to mob justice in which a wrong doer can be killed in broad daylight.

There is a strong sense of community, of family solidarity, yet the sense of public spirit-ness and philanthropy is weak—the rich cannot even get together and construct proper roads to their mansions. Everyone seems to expect the state to provide, but they do not organize to pressure the state and do not step in where the state is virtually non-existent, as is the case in large parts of rural Haiti. Port-au-Prince, where everything is concentrated and centralized, is not Haiti, she insisted, and she invited me to visit her university and talk to students. She encouraged me to visit as many places outside of Port-au-Prince as possible to get a fuller picture of the complexity, diversity, and spirit of Haiti. As we left the restaurant, she commented on the beautiful art adorning the walls. She observed that a society that can produce such beautiful art would always survive, for its spirit is alive

and well. She asked me about my research and seemed truly fascinated and eager to learn more about it. I thoroughly enjoyed our lunch.

Today was the fullest I had seen the restaurant. Many of the customers were in police fatigues with small emblems of Canadian flags. As we came to the Villa we had seen a bevy of 4x4s, including some with the authoritative UN emblem on side doors. Many more people were stretched out along the pool—stocky men, bald and tattooed, keepers of the peace in far-away Haiti, making themselves at home. A few bikini-clad white women hovered or loitered near them.

I spent the rest of the day going through proofs of the *Conflicts* book and generally taking it easy and trying to rest after what has been a long week. Next week is likely to be even busier. I briefly talked to my niece Angela, who seemed to be having a great time, and my son Mwai, who has been in Atlanta with his sister and cousin since Friday evening and leaves tomorrow. Natasha was at work. I also talked to Cassandra.

All in all, it has been a good week and a successful start to my research trip in Haiti.

July 9, 2007

Two sets of interviews were scheduled for today, one with the musician Emeline Michel at 10:00 a.m. and the other with the Dean of the Faculty of Ethnology at Université d'Etat d'Haïti (UEH) at 1:00 p.m. To my great disappointment, Emeline had to cancel because of an unexpected change of plans. She was sitting in the hotel lobby with two other people when we saw her around 9:45 a.m. and she came over to explain and apologize. She was so good about it, she sounded convincing even if she didn't mean it. She gave me her U.S. contact info and I told her I would call her or even meet her if I happened to be in New York. I gave her my business card. Katia looked disappointed but took it in stride.

This meant that we had plenty of time before the next interview downtown. Had we known earlier, of course, Katia wouldn't have come all the way to the Villa in the morning and I would have worked on the proofs of my *Conflicts* book. I had run out of local money and the Villa doesn't change money so we decided to go to a bank. We walked a mile or so before we found one. It was already sweltering hot by then and I was dripping with sweat. I hate heat! The bank was very cool, but the lines too long, and so Katia suggested we find another or a foreign exchange bureau. As much as I like and need walking, it felt like torture because of the unbearable heat. We found another bank that was similarly packed. In the end, we settled on a Western Union. The city seemed littered with Western Unions on every street, almost on every corner, a tribute to the society's and economy's dependence on the diaspora. Thankfully, the Western Union was air-conditioned and I could get a little respite from the suffocating heat.

Opposite the Western Union was Galerie Marassa, which we decided to visit to kill time. It has some wonderful art, sculptures, and objects, including furniture and jewelry. There were two people sitting at a desk near the entrance, both of whom welcomed us warmly. When they were told I was from Africa, the woman smiled broadly and welcomed me again, looking quite fascinated. I was immediately struck by the exquisite, semi-abstract paintings of the acclaimed artist Philippe Dodard. The woman explained that he is one of Haiti's top artists. Katia asked if we could arrange to interview him. The woman responded with an impeccable smile that she could contact him if we bought one

of his paintings; he sometimes did talk to buyers of his work. The cheapest Dodard in the gallery was \$1,000. Perhaps I would meet him in another context!

It was around 11:30 a.m. by the time we left the gallery. Fortunately, we could catch the tap tap to UEH downtown just around the corner. The tap tap was packed to capacity; it felt like an oven. Mercifully, unlike the *matatus* I used to take in Kenya in the 1980s when I taught at Kenyatta University, there was none of that nauseous odor oozing out of unwashed, sweaty armpits. Neither were there the obvious smells of cheap perfume. One has to be grateful for such small mercies.

The traffic was very heavy and we crawled into downtown. It took us twice as long as it had taken us on other occasions. Even then, we still had more than 50 minutes to spare. We went to the National Art Gallery, which was surprisingly less impressive than the Pantheon and the private galleries we had visited. The paintings were mostly from the 1930s–1960s and many had religious themes—representations of biblical stories or Voodoo beliefs and rituals. The most impressive were the abstract paintings by Jean-Claude Garoute, popularly known as “Tiga.” Their bold, dark, brooding strokes of existential angst are celebrations of the indomitability of the human spirit. I stood staring at the large canvasses, overawed by their expressive power. He died last December.

We got to the faculty of Ethnology on time, but we were kept waiting for about a quarter of an hour until the Dean had finished his previous appointment. The Dean, or *Doyen* in French, is a short, skinny man with big expressive eyes and long unkempt hair on the sides of his bald head. Simultaneously intense and distant, he has the wiry look of a preoccupied man. Dean Yves Dorestal got his bachelor’s degree at UEH and proceeded to Germany where he received his MA and PhD in Frankfurt. Altogether, he spent twelve years abroad during the Duvalier dictatorship like many Haitian intellectuals who fled the country. His area of specialization is Marxist philosophy.

Besides Germany, he spent time in Central America—in Nicaragua and Honduras and Chile—where he taught for two years. At the university where he taught in Honduras he was only one of three to five black professors, while at the private university he taught in Chile he was the only black professor. He compared the situation of the black people in these countries to Haiti, noting how utterly marginalized they are politically, economically, socially, and educationally. The same is true in the Dominican Republic where blacks would rather be called Indians rather than black; Haitians are supposed to be black. He gave us a detailed comparative analysis of the relative condition of black people in the Americas, including the United States.

His main argument was that levels of marginalization and empowerment for the African diaspora in each country depended on the relative combinations of demographic factors, class structure, political culture, cultural dynamics, social movements, and racial ideologies. For example, in Brazil the African diaspora derived its cultural weight from its large size, which had yet to be translated into a significant political presence because of the enduring ideology of racial democracy. In the U.S., the African diaspora remained economically marginalized, but had made significant political advances because of civil rights struggle that brilliantly tapped into American political discourse.

He had just started talking about his background when he excused himself to look for the other professors on the faculty and a professor from Congo Brazzaville who he said I would enjoy talking to. Dr. Dienguete Matsua is the Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and he has been in Haiti for ten years. He is a cheerful, slightly built man with a scruffy graying beard and small laughing eyes. He studied in France and

came to Haiti to do research on Voodoo. The conversation became an immensely rich dialogue in which Yves and Dienguete took turns in answering my questions on Haitian culture and society. It lasted two hours. Occasionally, Yves would leave to attend some matters or his secretary would come, bringing papers for him to sign. We were kindly offered coffee, but when it came, Yves forgot to serve it for almost twenty minutes and when he did, it was lukewarm.

Our subsequent conversation centered on a wide range of issues on Haitian culture, history, and place in the Pan-African imagination. I was given a long, fascinating account of the development of Voodoo in Haiti from its complex combinations of West African and Roman Catholic traditions. They discussed the similarities and differences it shared with other Africa-derived religions in the Americas, such as Santería in Cuba and Candomblé in Brazil, and with traditional African religions in terms of its beliefs, rituals, and practices. The role of Voodoo in the Haitian Revolution was underscored by the fact that the majority of Haitians at the time were African born or offspring of African-born slaves who followed Voodoo. The revolution was triggered by the Bwa Kayiman ceremony in which those congregated at this historic Voodoo ritual swore to overthrow French rule by killing whites on the island.

Haiti occupies a complex and contradictory place in the history, memory, and representation of the African diaspora in the Americas. The Haitian Revolution created the first modern black state and second free republic in the Americas. This gave Haiti immense significance in the history of the Americas. On the one hand, Haiti represented the achievement of black political resistance and modernism, but the country's subsequent challenges and failures came to denote the incapacity of black people to develop economically. In the early nineteenth century, Haiti became a beacon of freedom and it inspired slave revolts elsewhere in the Americas, including the United States, which contributed to the abolition of the slave trade. The French were forced to abandon their dreams of empire in the Americas and discharged their territories, including the large land mass in the southern part of the United States sold in the Louisiana Purchase. In the meantime, Haiti provided much needed support for independence movements in Latin America.

The disruptions caused by the revolution and its difficult aftermath, which included the embargo against Haiti by the major powers, provoked migrations from Haiti across the Caribbean and to the American mainland. This tradition has continued and has contributed to the spread of Haitian influences across the Americas. All this has contributed to Haiti's special place in the history of Pan-Africanism. Yves noted the migrations by Haitian intellectuals and several prominent figures to Francophone Africa. He talked about his own three-week sojourn in Senghor's Senegal where he was shocked at the high levels of French dominance even at the university. Many prominent African intellectuals have also visited Haiti over the decades. At this point, Dienguete talked of his experiences and of many other Africans like him in Haiti, which were both positive and negative. He stressed the role that African unity and development can play in uplifting the diaspora. In this regard, the role of universities in forging knowledge and linkages between Africa and Haiti and the diaspora could not be overemphasized.

I was fascinated by their discussion of the changing construction of Haitian identity over time, the role played by internal and external factors, the survival and reformulation of African cultural influences in Haitian culture, besides Voodoo, in the areas of gender relations, food, fashions, and aesthetics. Also, the question of Haitian perceptions of Africa as history and as reality, the differences among those who deny an African identity,

those who affirm a mystical or historical identity, and those who see connections with the realities of contemporary Africa. They emphasized the varied social identities among the bourgeoisie and other social classes, generational and gender dynamics of the identity formations, and the impact of the contemporary processes of globalization, information technology, and migrations.

By the time we noticed how much time had passed, it seemed we had only begun and could go on. Katia was unusually animated and eager to learn. Both Dean Dorestal and Dr. Matsua offered to meet again should I have further questions. They suggested several scholars that I might wish to talk to, including those affiliated with the Institute of African Studies. Yves even suggested a Cameroonian neighbor who lived on his street.

On the way back to the Villa, Katia insisted on seeing me off at the Villa although I said I could now make it on my own. She wanted to make sure I was safe, she said. What I did after she dropped me was my business. She is so sweet, so protective, and so anxious that everything works out for me. It was a nice, restful evening, except for the news that someone had tried to break into Natasha's car. She is getting more despondent at her inability to find a job. I called and text-messed her, offering her support and encouragement, urging patience and perseverance, reminding her she could always come and stay with us if she didn't find a job soon and continue searching while she lived with her parents—an idea she hates. I admire her independent spirit, but true independence can only come if she is able to support herself.

I spent quite some time answering e-mail messages. The Internet had been down yesterday at the hotel and, strangely, at UIC as well, so I could not get e-mails from my UIC account on my Blackberry. It's amazing how much unnecessary anxiety such brief ruptures can cause.

Tomorrow there are no scheduled interviews, unless something crops up. I hope it doesn't to save myself, for a day at least, from the scorching heat and crowded tap taps. It will be nice to complete the proofs of Volume 1 of the *Conflicts* book, and to get up without a wakeup call. The pleasures of such small freedoms are welcome indeed!

July 10, 2007

This has been quite a lovely, restful day. I took a long leisurely breakfast by the pool, spending enough time to actually enjoy the breakfast itself and the view of the surroundings—the trees around one side of the pool deck and the sight of the Villa itself, a low lying building, which from where I was sitting, looks like a big house hiding the rooms on three floors lying behind.

I had taken several chapters of the proofs of the *Conflicts* book that I planned to read by the pool, but by the time I had finished breakfast the heat was already becoming rather unpleasant, so I withdrew to the room which had already been cleaned. I switched the air conditioner on and went to work. It's amazing how reading proofs suddenly makes a book real, no longer a mere manuscript, and to imagine I had already gone through the chapters a million times, but now they read so fresh, so complete, so interesting. There were of course the odd typos here and there, the need to change the tense given the passage of time, and an occasional sense of disappointment that the data could not be updated, the argument sharpened in view of new developments both on the ground and in the

scholarship. Later in the day, emboldened that I had read much of the first volume save for the last chapters, I decided to e-mail four carefully chosen people to request that they write a blurb for the book.

In between reading the proofs, I attended to UIC and personal matters. I had a conference call with Carla and Trina to discuss various office matters related largely to the budget, and responded to a bunch of work related e-mails. The new information technologies do facilitate virtual work anywhere at any time, which is not an entirely good thing.

I got a surprising call from Moza in the mid-afternoon; he got the hotel number from Cassandra. He was thrilled with the way Angela's visit has gone; she apparently had a good time in Atlanta with her cousins. Mainly he called to tell me he had found a seven-acre plot of land that we could purchase for the old man, as we call our father, in Lilongwe and build a house for him. The owner wanted payment by the end of the month and we agreed we would share the cost. That is the least we can do for him in his old age. It's amazing that while he is 77 this year, to us he still looks the way he did when we were younger; the same slim build and expressions, even the same voice and laughter, except that now he is bald. But so are Moza and I.

Tiya also called and we had a long, hilarious talk about some of our colleagues at Penn State, and more seriously about Thandika's candidacy for the Vice-Chancellorship at the University of Cape Town, for which we had both encouraged him to apply. Finally, it was Cassandra and Angela. They spent hours shopping at Target and the DSW shoe store near our residence in Chicago. By the time I was ready to call it a day, I was hardly in Port-au-Prince anymore, mentally. But tomorrow I have to get up early for more conversations, one at 9:30 in the mountains. That brought me back to Haiti and my research.

July 11, 2007

Our first interview was with Senator Jean Maxine Roumer and was scheduled for the mid-morning. We were able to get to his place on time using a tap tap. When we arrived at the junction leading to his house and got off the tap tap, Katia called him. When he heard we were on foot the senator sent his driver to pick us up, although we said we could walk.

The Senator's house, like all houses in the area, was hidden behind high stone walls. The house itself looked modest and it was scantily furnished. We sat in the living room around a small coffee table. The walls had several paintings by the senator himself, dated mostly back to the 1990s; several were quite good. There was another room, slightly elevated, next to where we were sitting. There was a bed in one corner; one of those hospital beds that can be maneuvered for sitting and lying positions. An old man lay there. Occasionally, I would steal glances and saw some movement. From time to time, the old man would let out a frightening, loud sound—a cough and scream combined. He was hooked up to a respirator. A TV lay at the edge of the bed in one corner next to the stairs leading to what I presumed were the bedrooms.

Senator Roumer is a tall man, perhaps six-foot-five, with a small mouth and big nose. He wears glasses. He is blind in one eye. He was wearing a white shirt, khaki trousers, and jogging shoes. He gave me a firm handshake when he came down the stairs. He began speaking almost immediately, pointing out that he had been informed about my work

by Professor Renate Schneider. Even before we had asked him any questions, he began talking about the African diaspora in the Americas, comparing Haiti and other countries in the region and giving a brief history of Haiti in general and of Haitian culture in particular. He must have taken at least a quarter of an hour and then he asked what I would like us to discuss. It became clear that he was an extremely knowledgeable man with a sharp analytical mind.

An economist by training, Senator Roumer is widely traveled, has varied interests, and is well versed in the history of the Pan-African world. I marveled as he discussed or mentioned prominent figures, the names of renowned intellectuals, and his experiences. He is clearly a raconteur, a man who loves to talk, how much, though, I had little idea. I thought the interview would last perhaps an hour at most. It went on for three and a half hours! Each time I thought we were almost done and thanked him, he would open a new area of discussion. It was as if he was hungry to talk. The interview will take Katia hours to transcribe and will be fun to read. The conversation was so rich with information and insight that I felt I was back in school learning at the feet of a master teacher, which was an exhilarating feeling. It didn't hurt that it was cool, thanks to our location high in the mountains. The senator was also quite gracious, offering us coffee and then passion fruit with some fine French bread. It seems he has a retinue of domestic workers. I identified at least two women and one man. At one point the two women moved the bed with the old man into a corner where we could not see them wash him. It was at that point that we went outside—I thought we were done, but the senator led us to the garden where we sat and he continued for another half an hour. When we walked out, he mentioned that the old man was his father who is 103 years old. I gasped.

The senator clearly belonged to one of Haiti's elite families. Katia later explained that they founded the country's first candy company and you see the Roumer name on candy bars. They are mulatto. So wide ranging was the conversation that it is best to provide a thematic rather than chronological summary.

First, he talked about his personal and professional background: his studies in Paris where he met many Africans, and his work as an economist and as a senator. He wishes he was not a politician but somebody involved in politics, a distinction he thought was vital. For politicians, politics is a career for which they are prepared to sacrifice everything including their principles.

Second, he provided a fascinating and informative account of Haiti's long and complex history. He traced the complex and contradictory legacies of the anti-slavery and independence movements that culminated in the Haitian Revolution, which had a huge impact on the Americas. After independence, Haiti descended into damaging oligarchies as the difficulties of constructing and conceiving an alternative vision of the new nation state became more evident, a challenge, we both noted, which has confronted many African countries since independence. The American occupation left its own contradictory impact on Haitian politics, society, and culture. For one thing, it engendered new forms of Haitian nationalism, which culminated in the destructive years of the Duvalier dictatorship, which were followed by the missed opportunities and terror of the Aristide years. The South Africans didn't know the real Aristide when they gave him asylum, he claimed.

Third, he talked about Haitian culture, the arts, music, and Voodoo. He perceptively identified the processes of African cultural retention, invocation of symbolic African memories, and syncretization with other cultural influences. He noted the diversity of

Voodoo practices in different parts of Haiti and across the Haitian diaspora. He also gave a fascinating account on the geographical differences in the development and Africanness of Haitian culture, which in part reflected the ethnic origins and settlement patterns of the enslaved Africans. For example, while Voodoo generally reflects West African religious practices, in northern Haiti there are pronounced influences from the Congo.

Fourth, we discussed Haiti's relations with Africa and Pan-Africanism. He noted that during the period of colonial rule in Africa, contacts with Haiti were limited except for Liberia and Ethiopia. He noted in passing that the road to the airport is called Haile Selassie. Under the Duvalier dictatorship, which coincided with decolonization in much of Africa, ambivalent relations developed. Aspects of negritude were embraced but it was difficult for a semi-fascist dictatorship to work with the progressive socialist regimes of the Sekou Toures, Kwame Nkumahs, Ben Bellas, and Gamal Nassers. In this vein, we also talked about the complex relations between Haitians and African Americans, the changes they underwent before and after the civil rights movement, and in recent times. He noted how Aristide effectively used the U.S.'s Congressional Black Caucus to his advantage.

As for the Haitian diaspora, he distinguished between different waves, their varied destinations, social class backgrounds, and their differentiated impact on Haiti. Outward migration goes back to the days of slavery and was accelerated during and after the revolution when slave masters fled, together with some of their slaves, to other Caribbean islands and to mainland North and South America. In modern times, emigration accelerated during the Duvalier dictatorship as tens of thousands of professionals fled against intensifying repression. The outflow of poorer segments of Haitian society, the infamous boat people, increased as economic conditions deteriorated. The vast majority of the Haitian diaspora lives in the United States, some estimates indicate there are more than a million, Canada may have nearly a quarter million, mostly in Quebec, and another 90,000 or so live in France. Large numbers of Haitians can also be found in the Dominican Republic, some say up to a million, and other Caribbean islands from Cuba to the Bahamas.

The Haitian diaspora tends to be portrayed negatively, but it is important to point out the enormous contributions they have made in their countries of residence. He noted proudly that Chicago, the U.S.'s third-largest city, was founded by a Haitian, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, and Canada's current Governor General, Mich  lle Jean, went to Canada as a refugee in 1968 at age 11. The Haitian diaspora is an important engine of Haitian development through the remittances they send back and the skills they sometimes bring back. But there was no question that the country has paid a high price. He lamented the effects of the export of human resources and capital from Haiti, noting that 86% of the country's professors are abroad, how the rich countries in the North, such as Canada, steal Haitian resources while claiming to be trying to help Haiti to develop. He was extremely animated, almost agitated on this point.

Finally, he discussed the development of the Haitian economy and the deep-seated structural problems compounded in recent years by neo-liberal policies and the pressures for democratization. He was scathing on the proliferation of political parties, saying that in Parliament many of these parties behave like bandits. Many of the parties are not motivated by national interest and can easily be bribed for votes. The economic situation in the country is very grave; there is a need for a massive jobs program, for effective policies of sustainable development. Last year, Port-au-Prince was initially closed due to insecurity, which scares away both domestic and foreign investment. The political and economic crises cannot be separated and must be handled together, comprehensively.

It was while sitting in the garden that Senator Roumer asked Jean Felix Benoit, who we had seen briefly in the house, to join us. He is a music professor and a former student of Senator Roumer's. For the next hour, Benoit discussed music with us. The Senator would come in and out into the conservation as he and one of the women domestic workers tended to the flowers. Jean grew up with music. His father played the guitar and his mother sang. He went to Mexico to study music and he has produced three CDs. He currently teaches music at UEH and he is planning to set up a jazz academy to do research on jazz and Voodoo music and promote a fusion between the two styles. He is an enthusiastic teacher of music. In that one hour, I felt I learned more than the many books and articles I have read. A relatively young man probably in his mid-thirties, he would illustrate the point he was trying to make with musical notes, a smile lighting up his round face.

He noted that Haitian music is a *mélange* of various traditions, the rhythmic and melodic influences from Africa most strongly preserved in Voodoo music, the harmony of western music, and the melody of Greco-Latin religious music. He noted the development of rural and urban music styles. He discussed the changes in Haitian music from Rara to Kompa to Haitian rap. He noted the different characteristics of the various styles and some of the factors that led to their development. Rara was strongly tied to Voodoo, while Kompa emerged in the nineteenth century and gained popularity after the Second World War, and rap is trendy among contemporary Haitian youth and socially conscious musicians wishing to make political commentary. There has been vigorous exchanges between Haitian and other Caribbean music, as well as music from the U.S. Kompa is quite similar to merengue in the Dominican Republic and merengue in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Rap music was derived from the U.S. Earlier, Haitian musicians developed mini-jazz from American pop.

He elaborated specifically on some of the following issues: comparisons between Haitian and other Caribbean music; exchanges between Haitian and African-American music; the important role played by the Haitian diaspora in this musical exchange; the complex and continuing exchanges with African musical styles; the fascinating gender dynamics of Haitian musical production; the changing economics of the musical industry; the growing impact of modern technology on Haitian musical production and aesthetics; and the far-reaching impact of his Mexican musical education on his own music. Clearly, his command over the subject is far more masterful than Odil's, the young musician we talked to several days ago. There was no doubt Haitian music shared many similarities with other music of the Caribbean and the African diaspora in the Americas; the differences are the result of specific histories of population movement and cultural and artistic developments. An African musical matrix underlies these diaspora musical traditions, overlaid, in different measures, by European musical forms and the very complex syncretization of the diasporic condition and creativity.

Our second meeting originally scheduled for the day was supposed to be with an artist who had promised to call Katia and confirm for either 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. By the time we finished talking to Jean at 2:00 p.m., Katia had not heard from him. She had tried to call him earlier, but to no avail. Even if he did not turn up, between Senator Roumer and Jean, we had had quite a lot to chew on for the day.

Senator Roumer kindly asked his driver and a young man who looked like his son to drop us off at the Villa. I thanked him sincerely for his generosity. I was convinced he was still eager to talk. He gave a list of people to call, including artists and politicians, some of whom he called before we left and confirmed their availability for interviews.

As we descended the mountain, in the air-conditioned car, it suddenly occurred to me that this was the most comfortable ride I had taken since coming to Haiti. Somehow, the road and the houses hanging on the mountain edges looked far less disagreeable! It was a four-door pick-up truck. All around us, in front, behind, and on the other side of the road, were 4x4s, save for the tap taps and a few lonely saloons. This was lopsided development in motion—these gas guzzlers are needed for the bad roads, and consume the country's meager foreign exchange revenues and resources that could be used to build better roads and reduce oil imports. But it's every elite for themselves, the rest can walk, or take over-crowded, rickety tap taps.

Taking advantage of my new, temporary fortune, I asked when we got to Pétionville if we could buy some mangoes on the roadside. Last Sunday I had bought mangoes at the market. The roadside vendors placed their wares in far more appealing kiosks than those in the market. Of course, when they saw us come out of the expensive vehicle and I made the mistake of speaking English, the price went up. Katia was outraged. She promised to buy me some mangoes tomorrow.

When we got to the Villa, Katia called the artist. He responded and asked if we could postpone. I readily agreed. It had been a long, productive day. Katia said she would call if she were able to organize another interview tomorrow; otherwise, we had several interviews on Friday. I reminded her about the music festival tonight in Pétionville. She agreed to return with one of her friends who had a car and they would take me to the festival. Unfortunately, it began raining heavily in the early evening and Katia called to say she would not be coming, for the festival was likely to be cancelled.

For the first time, I ordered room service and settled in to reading some news online, responding to e-mail, and watching a little television. Before going to bed, I talked to Angela and bade her farewell. Cassandra said they had spent the whole day shopping. She sounded exhausted but happy that Angela's visit had gone well.

July 12, 2007

Another day saved from the scorching heat and tap taps. There were no scheduled activities today. I had another leisurely breakfast by the pool and spent much of the day in the room going through the last chapters of the proofs for the *Conflicts* book. I was briefly interrupted in the early afternoon by a call from reception saying I had a visitor at the front desk. A visitor? Nobody knew I was here. It had to be Katia. Indeed, it was her. She had brought me mangoes I had failed to buy yesterday—big, juicy mangoes! She is so sweet. And she reported on her efforts this morning to round up interviews for tomorrow—three of them. She looked tired from walking in all that heat and asked if she could have some water. She also looked famished. I invited her for lunch. Although it was after 2:00 p.m., the restaurant was full of young people who were obviously attending a conference. We later found out that it was a UNICEF conference on the rights of the child.

After lunch, Katia left and I went back to my book. I typed about four pages of corrections and e-mailed them to the publishers. It was early evening by then and I turned to responding and writing e-mails, many related to office work.

I was tempted to start reading the proofs to the second volume of the *Conflicts* book, but decided to give myself a break by indulging one of my favorite pastimes—reading

online newspapers. Zimbabwe's tragedy riles me up — now the bankrupt dictatorship is going after shop owners and business people. I am not a fan of capital and capitalists, but this is suicidal — a dying regime that wants to go into its grave with the entire country — sickening, utterly disgusting! The madness of Iraq continues. The delusional Bush and his minions, including his insufferable British poodle, Tony Blair, still believe the Iraq invasion can be salvaged, that the so-called "surge" — in reality, a desperate murderous rampage — can snatch victory from the sands of defeat. Bush and Mugabe, who purportedly despise each other, are cut from the same cloth of terror and megalomania. And we all suffer from it, terribly.

July 13, 2007

As if making up for yesterday, today was unusually busy. The day started with a breakfast conversation with a Haitian researcher based at the University of Miami, followed later in the morning with the Dean of the *Institute d'Études et de Recherches Africaines d'Haïti* (IERAH), and ended with the Regional Director of the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF).

I met Louis Herns Marcelin under the huge tree that faces the pool at the Villa where breakfast is offered every morning. It was perhaps the most gratifying interview I have had so far. Perhaps it was because it was all in English. Maybe it was because it was framed in a familiar intellectual language. Most likely, it was the vast knowledge, the passion, the articulateness he displayed. I told him I would invite him to come to UIC to give a talk and contribute to the special issue of *Research in African Literatures* that I am co-editing on the bicentennial of the British abolition of the slave trade.

Louis is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Miami. He is also affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health and he is Director of the Research, Family and Community Health Center. The position is split 40%–60%, teaching and research, which allows him to come to Haiti every month. A brown-skinned man, he is of average height and weight, sports a thin mustache and talks with an intensity accompanied by deliberative hand gestures. He is very sharp. He received his PhD at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and has been working on Haitian youth gangs in Miami-Dade, Florida.

What I appreciated most is that as he ran me through the intellectual, political, and cultural history of Haiti, he gave me extensive references explicating the periods and tendencies he was describing, which I will follow up on. He promised to send me a more extensive list later on. He took me through nineteenth-century Haitian authors and thinkers, how they tried to deal with the legacies of plantation slavery, the questions of race and racism, the construction of a Haitian identity, and the place of Haiti in the modern world. These debates were complex, rich, and full of contradictions, reflecting the complexities of post-revolutionary Haitian society, itself still deeply marked by the class, racial, and color hierarchies of its slave past, and the prevailing racial ideologies of the nineteenth century. The American occupation marked a crucial watershed, a period during which the movement of indigenization developed and flourished. Indigenization was both an ideology and a philosophy, each of which had many layers and contradictions. As an ideology, it spawned nationalism that would culminate in Duvalierism, while as a philosophy it was associated with negritude and conceptions of Haitian nationhood and identities overseas.

The discourses and trajectories of the ideologies and national identities embodied in indigenization facilitated the rise of Duvalier, Duvalierism, and notions of noirism (black power) which fed into some of the deformities of the Duvalier dictatorship. Overriding themes running through post-revolutionary Haitian history have been the problematic relationship between the elites and the rural masses that they despise, and the challenges of constructing and pursuing domestic and international political projects. This conundrum confronts the entire Caribbean region where there are nations without states, states without nations, and nation states vying for existence and space in a region in a world dominated by powerful metropolises. He proceeded to give a nuanced reading of the problems for several Caribbean countries: the Dominican Republic, whose national identity is premised on anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism; Jamaica and Cuba, as well as Venezuela and Brazil, where he lived for five years. He stressed these are very complex historical processes; there are certainly no easy villains in Haitian history.

The conversation was so intense and rich that we hardly paid any attention to the other guests enjoying their breakfasts under the canopy, and we could have gone on if Katia had not flashed a note saying it was 9:30 a.m. and we needed to leave for our next appointment at the Institute at UEH downtown. Louis and I bade each other farewell, agreeing that our conversation and collaboration had only begun. He feels strongly about the need for establishing sustainable institutional collaborations among researchers on the African diaspora that can transcend and survive individual enthusiasm, and he invited me to join the network he is engaged in. I accepted the invitation and agreed with him wholeheartedly.

From the Villa we rushed to the main road to catch a tap tap for downtown. At the Institute, we were welcomed by the Dean, Franck J. Ricot. He led us to a room where we held our discussions. He was accompanied by two colleagues, Guy Germardo, and Harold Lindor. I surmised this was the Institute's computer room, for there were more than a dozen Dell computer stations. A short man, wearing a blue suit with light stripes, the Dean quickly got to business and outlined the history and work of the Institute. He noted that the Institute was created by a presidential decree to promote the study and research of Africa and Haitian Americans. Haiti has a special place in the history of the African diaspora and Africa, and Africa is central to the history of Haiti. He discussed the intellectual context in which the systematic study of Africa began and its ties to the indigenization movement, during which the faculty of Ethnology was created (initially called Ethnology Bureau) out of which IERAH emerged. He described the kind of African history and the authors that Haitian intellectuals and students learned from the pre-colonial to the colonial eras.

He singled out the works Cheikh Anta Diop. He noted many Haitian intellectuals went and worked in Africa, especially in the Francophone countries. The Institute teaches students both about pre-colonial or traditional and contemporary Africa, covering a wide range of issues—political, economic, social, cultural, language (Lingala and Swahili). Also, students are taught about other African diasporas, including those in other Caribbean islands and in the U.S. He gave several examples of student dissertations on African studies and diaspora studies. He noted that African professors occasionally come to the Institute; there were currently two, one from Cameroon and another from the Congo. Haitian students and professors who are connected to the Institute visit African institutions, but more could be done to promote these exchanges.

I asked him, when he had finished his long introductory remarks, to elaborate on the research done by faculty and students at the Institute; the memory of Africa in the Haitian

popular imagination and culture; the role of Haiti in the Pan-Africanist movement; and the role of Haitian culture in the Caribbean. He stressed that African culture was omnipresent in Haiti from religion (Voodoo) to family practices and work habits. Guy Bernardian would occasionally put in a word, but Lindor hardly said anything except to nod in agreement. It was clear this was Franck's show. An hour later, he stood up and bade me an enthusiastic farewell, saying he had enjoyed meeting me and looked forward to future visits and collaborations. I left with the clear impression that the Institute does important work on Africa and the Dean and his colleagues are very well-informed about African developments. African institutions need to work closely with an Institute like this for mutual benefits.

Our next appointment, in a nearby building, was not until 3:00 p.m., and four hours seemed too long to linger around so I suggested returning to the Villa to do some work. We were waiting for a tap tap when someone stopped and beckoned Katia. It was a friend of hers and he offered us a lift in his 4x4. The music was turned on loud. Perhaps in his late twenties, the young man got into a long conversation with Katia as he waded through, rather quickly, the narrow, congested streets in a part of town I had not yet been to. He was trying to avoid the traffic jam on the main street, Katia explained. We ended up on Delmas Street where he dropped us off, apologizing that he couldn't take us all the way back because he was at work. A minute later, we were on a tap tap back to Pétionville and we took another tap tap from the market to the junction leading to the Villa. By the time we got to the villa, it was noon.

I brought my computer to the lobby, which has access to wireless connection, and answered e-mails including invitations from the Norwegian government to a conference in Norway about the current positive changes in Africa, and another to give a keynote address in Mexico at a conference on Africa, Asian, and American studies. There was also a lot of office-related stuff; today is the last day to reconcile all the budgets for the past academic year. In between the e-mails, Natasha and I kept texting each other. She sounded so much better than she did the last time we communicated.

After 2:00 p.m. we went back to downtown. The offices of AUF are located on the side of the building of the Faculty of Languages and Applied Linguistics. The director, Emile Tanawa, is a Cameroonian scholar who used to teach at the University of Yaoundé. He gradually warmed up as he realized that he had once read one of my essays on African education. He understands English but spoke in French. He began explaining the work of AUF, that it was started to promote solidarity and linkages among Francophone universities in the North and the South, but much of its work focuses on universities in the South. He outlined the numerous areas in which AUF focuses its work, from student and faculty exchanges, provision of scholarships, promotion of scientific research and collaboration, building capacity, promoting effective governance, and information and communication technology cooperation. The AUF seeks to work with regional university associations in the Caribbean and Africa, such as the Association of African Universities, but this could be strengthened. Obviously, the AUF was not created for, nor has it promoted, Pan-African educational linkages, even if individual institutions might benefit.

I asked him to elaborate on exchanges between African and Haitian institutions. He noted there were very few. Likewise, Haitian higher education institutions do not enjoy close associations with other Caribbean institutions because of their low quality. Therefore, they are not respected in the rest of the Caribbean. This was a poverty-stricken country with archaic, backward, low-quality universities. He was emphatic that there was very

little that African institutions and Africa in general could learn from Haiti. He drew negative comparisons between Haiti and Cameroon. He was appalled by Haiti's insecurity, its apparent lack of respect for human life; although he conceded that he hasn't seen much of the country. Emile mentioned the similarities in terms of music. He noted there are quite a few Africans in Haiti and they are generally treated well. He has also met some Haitians who have worked in Africa, but he didn't comment on their perceptions of or treatment in Africa. He commented on the impact of globalization and transnationalism on higher education in the Caribbean and Africa, noting that it has largely been negative, for it has reinforced the dominance of institutions in the global North.

Clearly, Emile holds a low opinion of Haiti. On several occasions, he felt compelled to preface his negative opinions with apologies to Katia. Katia seemed a little taken aback and annoyed by his uncomplimentary views of her country, especially of its higher educational institutions. After we finished the conversation and were about to go, he asked me about my work on African universities, how he could order the two books I had co-edited on the subject. I showed him my website. By then he had become very friendly and he said he would love us to meet over a meal or a drink and wrote his cell phone number on the business card he had given me earlier. He escorted us to the door. He showed me a copy of his recent book.

On our way back, Katia didn't say much, except to comment that Emile needs to travel more through the country, that totally negative views like his are as prejudiced as totally positive views—there is a need for balance. As usual, she escorted me to the Villa; she just wanted to make sure I was safe, she said.

When I got to my room, I felt like crashing and taking a nap, but it was around 5:00 p.m. and I could wait a few more hours for a full night's sleep. I watched the TV news, went for another lonely dinner in the first restaurant I visited, read online newspapers and one of the magazines I had brought with me. By 10:00 p.m. I was ready to call it a day.

July 14, 2007

I did some historical sightseeing today. But before going to Fort Jacques up in the mountains we went to *College Université Caraïbe* that Katia attends. I was in for another shock. It's a dilapidated three- or four-story building. The classrooms look bare or have broken chairs. Katia explained the building is used both for primary and secondary school classes. The rest of the university is located elsewhere in the city.

Katia came to pick me up at 8:30 a.m. She explained she and a friend had secured a taxi for us to visit Fort Jacques, but first we would go to her campus for an interview with her professor who specializes on human rights. It later transpired that it wasn't really a taxi, but a tap tap that the friend had hired, and she called Katia to tell her unfortunately she would not be joining us because she needed to run some errands. The tap tap could pick us up from the campus once we were done with our visit there.

We got to the campus on time. The meeting with Katia's professor was scheduled for 9:00, and then he called to say 9:30 a.m. At the entrance, Katia was warmly greeted and embraced by several of her classmates. She led me through the small, dusty courtyard to the second floor where we pulled up dusty chairs in one of the corridors to wait for the professor. I was too stunned to talk, but Katia was obviously excited and she briefed me

about the professor, how he taught, his mannerisms, and his loud voice. There was a class being held in the next room, a mathematics class, she said. But my attention was caught by a woman in a house across the fence from the campus who kept throwing buckets of dirty water from the second floor.

The professor came at 9:35 a.m. and we looked for a room to sit in, settling for the one right behind us, which had a broken, dusty table, and no chairs. So we pulled in the chairs we were sitting on in the corridor. I had not seen Katia so excited; she was almost bubbly when she introduced me to her professor. He was indeed very knowledgeable, even passionate, about human rights. He noted that human rights are not respected in Haiti and have not been for a very long time by successive regimes. He discussed the state of civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, noting that none of these rights are protected in law or practice. He abhorred the gross abuses of human rights during the Aristide period, which reminded me of the conversations with the Haitian diaspora in Chicago. On the positive side, he commended the growth of the Haitian human rights movement and the role of civil society and the role of the Haitian diaspora in seeking to improve the human rights situation in the country. International events and players have also, in some cases, made some positive contributions. Nevertheless, connections between Haitian and other human rights movements remain weak. Unfortunately, he had an exam to give at 10:00 a.m. so there wasn't much time for us to go into details on any of these issues.

As we left, the professor kissed Katia on the cheek, as seems to be customary here. She said something like he thinks all the female students are his wives. I had noticed he was flirtatious with Katia. Apparently, he was divorced. The female students didn't like the way he treated them, she said. He was in his late thirties, and seemed to take great care in looking well-groomed, from his shoes to his well-trimmed afro.

Katia wasn't sure when and where the hired tap tap would pick us up. She suggested we wait at the shops nearby. As we were leaving the campus we bumped into Katia's friend, who works at the restaurant and seemed excited to see me and anxious to practice her English. There was a bench outside the supermarket where we sat to wait for the tap tap. Katia called the driver who assured us he was not too far, but was caught in heavy traffic. To break the boredom and the heat we briefly went into the supermarket to buy some bottled water. I was keen to compare prices, which were listed in Haitian dollars (5 gourdes = \$1 Haitian). Then we went into a clothing store. There were no lights on the entire second floor and the only light was from a few windows in the back. The prices were listed in American dollars. After what we thought was a decent interval, we went back to the bench. A good hour passed before the tap tap came. We watched people come and leave the supermarket and the other stores.

Class was clearly evident in the cars people drove, and almost predictably, the lighter they were in skin color, the more expensive the cars, the better dressed, and the greater the likelihood of being accompanied by someone carrying their bags. There were vendors everywhere—along the road, on street corners—selling everything from food to clothes; fruits, especially mangoes, oranges and bananas; sugarcane; roasted nuts; baked and fried breads, and *mandazis*; grilled and fried meats; soft drinks and water, it was all there. Vendors are everywhere across the city, along the roads, on the way to the mountain, at the mountaintop. Port-au-Prince is one vast marketing square. What seems to differentiate the market proper from the ubiquitous vending places is the range of goods: in the large markets, electronic equipment, including televisions, are also sold. And the crowds are more dense.

It was around 11:30 a.m. that the hired tap tap finally turned up. It looked battered but we were only too happy to hop on and squeeze in the front seat as the co-driver jumped into the back and sat on one of the benches. Up the mountain we went with our own tap tap, no stopping anywhere to pick up passengers waving for the tap tap. It was a taxi: It had cost us \$300 Haitian. But it moved slowly, not because there was much traffic, but because it was straining. And the road became much worse as we left the main road and took off to Fort Jacques. In fact, calling it a road is a misnomer. It was a track made up of deep gullies. All around us as we went up were huge houses, mansions—some under construction—side by side with modest working-class and peasant dwellings. It reminded me of Addis Ababa. The views were spectacular.

When we got to Fort Jacques, I was more relieved to exit the bouncing van than to see the fort itself. The fort was built in 1805 to protect the newly independent nation from French or Spanish invaders. From it, you can see the entire city of Port-au-Prince below. There was a slight haze enveloping the city so I couldn't see as clearly or take pictures, but it was a picturesque view nonetheless. A young man who introduced himself as Kevin and said he was 19, took it upon himself to be our guide. All around the fort there were couples having picnics or trying to be romantic. Inside the castle, there is a pond, which Kevin insisted has some fish, but which I could not see, as the water was murky. There were several rooms where soldiers used to sleep. Fifty to a room, Kevin said. There was also a cell that kept European prisoners, he added. On top, on each corner, there were cannons, 12 in all, that could fire 17–20 kilometers. A solid structure that had stood there guarding Port-au-Prince for 200 years, it was impressive and I took several pictures. For his labors, Kevin expected to be paid, which he was; so too did the man who kept the keys to the fort's doors. We paid him, but a lot more reluctantly. Outside the fort, in the gravel car park, there were vendors selling food and liquor, hard liquor!

The trip back turned out to be a little more adventurous. The tap tap broke down in the middle of the road, stuck in a gully. One of the axles holding the left tire broke. To avoid holding up traffic in both directions, the tap tap was pushed off the road and the two drivers got to work. I took pictures of the mountains and the valley and some of the surrounding houses, including the mansions with their television satellite dishes, antennas, and huge water tanks, mostly painted blue, jutting out of their roofs. The more modest dwellings hid some of their harshness and ugliness through banana and mango trees. Thirty minutes later the tap tap was ready to get back on the road and we rolled down the mountain without further incident. I was dropped off at the Villa. It was a taxi indeed.

I told Katia that tomorrow should be free for I want to take some rest and work on proofs of the second *Conflicts* book. She had arranged an interview with a musician in a band that has been playing together for about 40 years. She will rearrange it. It is not clear what we will do on Monday. The plans to go to Cap Haitien fell through when the person, a local politician, who had agreed to take us around, indicated he would not be there until Wednesday. The next best thing will be to go to Jérémie with Renate who is returning from Miami on Monday. We can drive there with her.

I talked to Cassandra and told her how boring I found the place in terms of being able to go out on my own to places including restaurants outside the hotel not connected to the research work. To my pleasant surprise, as I was eating dinner I saw three black women come in. They sat opposite my table. Lo and behold, they were speaking Swahili! I could understand their Swahili conversation and also, of course, when they switched to English, which they did often. I thought they were from Kenya. I was only partially right.

After my dinner, I could not resist passing their table and greeting them in Swahili and asking if I could join them for a minute. They seemed eager to meet another African as much as I was. We introduced ourselves. Christine was from Kenya and had been in Haiti for a year. She went to college at Moi University. Nadine was from Burundi and had only been here one month. Lulade was from Zimbabwe and had been here for two weeks. I asked them about their impressions and experiences of Haiti. They said it was very much like Africa, culturally and otherwise. They commented on the beauty of the island. They were perturbed, and thought it was funny, that Haitians thought they were superior to Africans; an attitude they said was common in the diaspora, especially among African Americans. They were horrified by the insecurity and surprised at the poor infrastructure.

I added my views on the arrogance among us as Africans who think negatively of each other and of the diaspora. We all seem to feel the need, the urge, to be superior to our own people. South Africa became Exhibit A in the conversation, but I wanted to remind them of Zimbabwean attitudes in the early post-independence years before the current meltdown, and of Kenyan superiority complexes in East Africa, but out of politeness, I kept those thoughts to myself. I even refrained from chastising Lulade when she claimed that the situation in Zimbabwe is not as bad as the western media claims, that people are doing very well there, and there are all sorts of flashy cars on the streets that you have never seen! She sounded so pathetic. The three women are all working for the UN peace-keeping mission in Haiti. I asked if I could talk to them further and maybe together with other Africans they knew next week. They expressed muted interest, but they gave me their telephone numbers. I will call them next week.

July 15, 2007

It was a lovely, peaceful, and productive day. I had a late breakfast and lingered there with my laptop reading online papers. I even read the latest issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. I began reading proofs of the second *Conflicts* book. When I found out that my salary had been deposited, I worked on my paying my bills. I was enjoying my reading so much I did not feel like going to the restaurant for dinner. I ordered room service. I have eaten practically all the meals on the menu so I decided to try their pizza. It was nasty. That was one of two unpleasant things today. The other was hearing back from an old friend who I had written off because of his unconscionable behavior. But talking to Cassandra, Natasha, and my longtime friend Tiya put me back in a good mood. Tiya and I have known each other since we were 14 and 13 years old, respectively. We have indeed come a long way from St. Patrick's Secondary School!

July 16, 2007

With no people to interview and no places to visit, I spent the day working on the proofs of the *Conflicts* book. I moved between reading in the room and in a nice little corner in the open bar. As with the first volume some of the chapters are good, others already seemed dated, and one or two I wouldn't include now if I were editing the book afresh. This is why books in general, except for the good ones, are often already dated by

the time they come out, at least compared to journal articles, which tend to have a faster turnaround.

The restaurant was unusually packed in the evening and the customers were a lot more mixed, although whites predominated. It was barbeque night. I ordered pork chops, but got five miserly pork ribs instead. Probably imported. Why take pride in announcing on the menu that chicken breast, beef, and fish are imported? After nearly two weeks, the food is becoming insufferably bland. Why can't they serve some tasty Haitian dishes? Surely, people don't eat such drivel in their own houses.

July 17, 2007

We had one appointment today with the Vice-President and Conservateur Generale of Le Musée d'Art Haïtien downtown. The visit was for 9:00 a.m. and Katia collected me at the Villa at 8:00 a.m. and we caught a tap tap. Being rush-hour, the traffic was slow but we got to the museum on time, with ten minutes to spare. The Conservateur Generale was on the phone and we were asked to wait. Katia informed me that he had lived in the Democratic Republic of Congo for five years.

An elderly man of above-average height, with graying hair and alert eyes, Michel-Philippe Lerebours shuffled into the waiting room with a curious smile on his face. He gave me a firm handshake and led us to his office. The office was packed with books and papers. There was a little table with a flask and three cups. But he asked us to sit facing him on his work table. For the next one and a half hours he took us on an impressive intellectual tour of the complex similarities and differences between Haitian and African cultures in general, and the expressive cultures, including the visual arts, in particular. Katia had indicated that he would only give us one hour and so we agreed that she would not be providing instant translation so that we could get as much out of him as possible. I trained my ear to follow. Fortunately, he said I could ask him questions in English.

He began with a fascinating analysis of the demographic and cultural affairs of Haiti during the war of independence. During this time, a large portion of the population consisted of African-born slaves and this group was not assimilated with the older Creole populations. This had profound political, philosophical, and cultural implications for the subsequent development of Haiti. It lay behind the challenges of creating a coherent modern nation, while providing possibilities of retrieving and recreating the African heritage. He insisted that Haitian culture is a mixture of African and western cultures, the processes of cultural formation and transmission were extremely complex. In many cases, values were transmitted while practices changed. He gave numerous examples from culinary, medical, linguistic, familial, funeral, religious, and artistic practices in which racial memory was reconstituted into new Haitian expressions and inventions.

I asked him to elaborate on the similarities, differences, and connections between African and Haitian arts. He distinguished between traditional and modern African art and for each noted the comparisons in terms of sensibility, aesthetics, conception, and styles of execution. He did the same for music and literature and noted the complex cross-fertilization across the Atlantic between African and diasporan expressive cultures.

I wanted him to talk about his experiences in the Congo and his face brightened and he sank into his chair. He felt accepted and noted many similarities even in the dictatorships

of Mobutu and Duvalier, but also became acutely aware of the differences in cultural values, practices, and expressions. He gave several examples which seemed to fascinate Katia and she followed up with a series of questions. He seemed to enjoy that and he patiently explained to the eager young woman. I can't wait to read the full transcript to pick out the bulk of what he was saying. Finally, he turned to discuss the major periods in the development of Haitian art. He identified what he called two grand periods: after independence, and since the 1940s. For each he outlined the socioeconomic and political contexts and the stylistic and aesthetic developments. He also mentioned some of the most influential and representative artists.

I left the museum wishing for more, but he had already indulged us enough. He walked us out of the office to the waiting room where a couple of people were waiting for him. He shook my hand again and I thanked him for his generosity. We walked through the museum, which we had visited last week, and I was struck once again by the visual and visceral power of Tiga's paintings. Katia said I probably couldn't afford his paintings since he was dead and they were very expensive. I nodded with regret.

Katia left me back at the Villa around 11:30 a.m. I invited her for lunch but she said she wanted to go home. She hadn't slept well last night partly because of school work. She is in the last semester and she wants to do well; also, one of her twenty-year-old nieces had not returned home to her parents' house and everyone has been worried. As we were walking back to the hotel, she received a call that her niece was alright. Selfish teenagers, I said. She agreed; apparently, her niece had been planning something like this with her friends for some time.

After lunch, I went back to the proofs, occasionally interrupted by responding to e-mails and reading online newspapers. I posted a brilliant, heart-wrenching blog by Pius Adesanmi on the human catastrophe unfolding in Afghanistan and Iraq—on how language and the very meaning of familiar terms are being massacred as ruthlessly as the innocent civilians who are pulverized, and the western media colludes in this horrendous crime. Pius is not only an incisive commentator, but a fine writer. I wrote him to say I hope every person in what he calls "the international community of conscience" reads this piece. Between him and Zine Magubane, *The Zeleza Post* is alive and well. They are both great advertisements for African public intellectuals. I am very proud of them!

July 18, 2007

I finally visited one of the shanty towns one sees from the road, Quartier Populaire des Gonaïves. It lies just behind Delmar Street, a few miles from the Villa. Immediately after getting off the tap tap into the street that leads to the Quartier you are hit by this wave of humanity—crowds buying, selling and milling around; vendors calling for customers on top of their lungs or using loudspeakers; and tap taps screaming with their horns. On sale is everything from fruits and vegetables, raw and cooked fish, clothes and utensils, and an assortment of electronic goods. The Quartier seems to be one large market, a maze of narrow, unpaved streets and pathways, crisscrossed by running gullies of thick, smelly water, and interspersed with rotting mounds of garbage. The rows of tiny concrete dwellings are occasionally broken by larger houses, some sporting two stories and even a garage. Every third or fourth structure seemed to be a shop of some kind. The Quartier offers a beehive of activity, of forced physical intimacy, children playing, women

cooking outside their dwellings, young men and women sauntering and eyeing each other, older men and women going about their business, and a few dogs running around, scavenging for food. It is noisy, overwhelming, alive, and for a passerby like me, surprisingly orderly, and intriguingly inviting.

Katia had warned me that I would find the Quartier difficult to go through. I told her I had seen similar places elsewhere, the favelas of Venezuela and Brazil, the slums of African cities from Mathare Valley in Nairobi to the shanties of Cape Town. It turned out Katia had spent five years or so living in the Quartier, and as we walked several people recognized her and she stopped to greet them. Her mother's old house was next to the church where we were scheduled to meet the Reverend Lerois Raymond.

We found the Reverend waiting for us inside the church, which was less than modest: a small pulpit and rows of up to twenty benches or so. There was loud music playing in one of the houses next to the church so the Reverend took us to an annex of the church, which was a little quieter. Children playing outside of the annex were told to lower their voices, although the large metal door was left open. The interview started at 9:10 a.m.

As far as interviews go, this was one of the least satisfactory, predictably so. He began by asking if I was a Christian and what my denomination was. I was taken aback. I mumbled that I had grown up in a Christian household and thought that was sufficient to pass the religious test. Then he said we should pray before we started the interview. I bowed my head. I knew then we would not get much out of him. I had hoped to discuss with him the development of the three major religious traditions in Haiti—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Voodoo—and their relations, their social bases and political roles in contemporary Haiti, and their international connections. Instead, what I got was an unabashed sermon on why Protestantism and his church were the biggest and the best in Haiti.

He conceded Catholicism has long enjoyed state support and remained a powerful force, while Voodoo was popular among the peasants. To indulge me as an African, he briefly mentioned that Haitian church leaders do visit Africa and vice versa and he found African church music quite inspiring. I was curious of what he thought of Islam. He had heard that some of the enslaved people in Haiti were Muslim, but knew very little about the impact of Islam in contemporary Haiti, except that Islam was now associated with terrorism. He tried to place some of the religious developments in the context of political changes, noting in this context the rapid growth of Protestantism after the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship.

We spent one hour speaking. A jovial man in his forties, the Reverend did not miss the opportunity to court me as a potential benefactor. To the slight embarrassment of Katia, who he fondly called his daughter, he told me the church has many needs and any assistance I could provide with my friends in the U.S. would be greatly appreciated. I nodded with understanding and promised that I would make a small contribution, but would not be able to come for Sunday services because we would be in Cap Haitien. As we left the annex of the church, he gave me a firm handshake and pointed to the black caps we were both wearing as a sign of brotherhood. We laughed at the joke and slowly made our way out of the crowded Quartier back to Delmas Street where we both took a tap tap to Pétionville.

Our next interview with one of Haiti's top economists was scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Fortunately, it was in Pétionville; not too far from the Villa. We had two hours to spare and decided to take an early lunch. I ordered what turned out to be a tasteless tuna sandwich—the tuna itself was fine, but it was spoiled by the soggy bread.

We arrived at the economist's office on time. But he was not there. Apparently, he had had to rush off to a wedding. We agreed to reschedule. Couldn't he have called before wasting our time? Although it was hot, I suggested to Katia that we walk back to the Villa, more for exercise than anything else. It took perhaps half an hour. Compared to the Quartier, Pétionville, save for the market and transport station, looked and felt decidedly cosmopolitan! That's how poverty and its social and physical degradations are invisible to the elites, who don't visit the shanties.

For the rest of the afternoon, I worked on the proofs of the *Conflicts* book. In the evening, I took dinner in the restaurant while it rained. It was a sight to behold. I love rain. There is something rejuvenating about it, primordial, almost spiritual, as the heavens unleash water to quench the parched earth. We used to play in the rain as kids. And when I started writing short stories, one my friends told me he had noticed that many of my stories had rain in the background. Tonight sitting in the restaurant—covered on top but open facing the pool—watching the torrent from the skies fall on the pool, the trees in the breakfast area, and the tiles next to the restaurant, listening to the rumbling clouds occasionally torn asunder by the sharp sirens of lightening, filled me with the joy and wonderment of my youth at the enchantment of rain. I lingered there long after I had finished eating, relishing the sounds and sights and earthy smells of rain.

July 19, 2007

I finally finished the proofs of the second volume of the *Conflicts* book. I was determined to finish today since we plan to visit Cap Haitien Saturday through Sunday, and Jérémie Monday through Tuesday. Effectively, this means my stay in Port-au-Prince is ending, although I will spend Sunday night and Tuesday night here. From what I hear about the limited facilities outside Port-au-Prince, I may not have access to the Internet in any case. I may not have time to work since we will be spending so little time in both places and have a lot of sight-seeing to do, so when Katia suggested that we go to an interview at 4 p.m. with a musician I asked to postpone it until tomorrow. She is also trying to arrange for interviews with the African women I met last Saturday. Christine, the Kenyan woman, says she is going to Miami on Friday for a week. Perhaps, Nadine and Sakonde will be able to get a few of their African colleagues, who have been here longer than them, for an interview tomorrow, Friday.

It's been terribly frustrating that we have not been able to talk to any women. Katia says she has tried several, but they all say they are too busy. This is, in itself, quite revealing about gender dynamics in this society. She gave me the name of the rector of her own university who I wrote to yesterday, as she requested, but I haven't yet heard back from her. I hope she accepts. And I hope we can round up a few more women to talk to in Cap Haitien, Jérémie, and Port-au-Prince in the remaining few days of my visit.

Besides working on the proofs, I answered some e-mails and read online newspapers and magazines. One of the e-mails was from Amina Mama, who I had missed when I visited Cape Town recently. She had gone to the United Kingdom to visit her parents with the kids. She has accepted the position at Mills College in Oakland, California over the one at Amherst College, partly because the former is for three years compared to the

latter's two, and also because she has family and friends in the Bay Area, which she will need as a new single parent. Single parenting is one of the most taxing responsibilities any parent can face. It was certainly the most trying time of my life, the years I spent in Champaign. It is also one of the most satisfying periods of my life because I had to tap into inner resources of love, patience, and fortitude I never knew I had before and I bonded with Natasha in ways I could never have imagined or achieved otherwise. Despite all the trials and tribulations of raising a teenage daughter single-handedly, this proved to be one of the the most enriching experiences of my life.

July 20, 2007

Today is the last full day for me in Port-au-Prince. It's been some experience, both fascinating and sobering. Fascinating because of the many interesting people and places I have visited and what I have learned about this historically critical and troubled country, but also sobering in terms of its failings, problems, and challenges; and the agonizing, frightening mirror it holds for the African diaspora. The triumphs and tragedies of Haiti, since its watershed revolution two centuries ago, encapsulate poignantly, painfully, and even prophetically the possibilities and perils of the African diaspora condition.

I spent a lazy and leisurely morning and early afternoon. At 2:30 p.m., Katia came to take me for the 4:00 p.m. interview with the musician who postponed from yesterday. It was back to tap taps and Delmas Street. The meeting was scheduled at a studio. We got to the studio, located in a relatively new three-story, yellow building on time. Bic, the musician, was only 10 minutes late, and had called to indicate that he would be a bit late. I immediately took a liking to him, not least of all because he spoke English and the entire interview was conducted in English. At about five-foot-ten, average weight, with a well-trimmed goatee and moustache, he had a clean look I didn't expect from a musician. Most importantly, he was very pleasant.

We began by discussing the main influence in the development of Haitian popular music in general as well as his music. For the former, he underscored the impact of French colonization historically and of American music in contemporary times. He himself tried to play a blend of different musical styles that would appeal to both Haitians at home and abroad and break into the international market. Throughout our hour-long conversation, he constantly returned to one theme, the need to develop Haitian music that had an overseas market, an international appeal. He deplored that Kompa had not been able to do this. It was popular among the Haitian diaspora because of the nostalgia, but the music had yet to make an international breakthrough.

He blamed this on the multiplicity of music genres, the fact that many Kompa musicians were not educated as musicians, not well-trained musically. There was a need to open music schools and systematically identify and cultivate musical talent. Now, the music scene in Haiti is dominated by six bands. He himself had yet to make a real breakthrough. He believes that once he makes it overseas he will be even better appreciated in Haiti than he is now. This was common, he said, international recognition is an important stamp of national recognition. His remarks bore the angst of postcolonial cultural marginality I am quite familiar with in Africa.

I was quite intrigued by his account of Haitian popular music. He indicated that Caribbean musical influences in Haiti were minimal compared to American influences. Reggae had some limited influences, but Latin music, as he called it, from say Cuba or the Dominican Republic, hardly had an influence; in any case, Haitian music was so much better than their music, he said. I was curious about African influences historically and presently. African musical influences were confined to drums and rural music. He loved all things African and he would like to tour the continent and asked if I could help arrange a tour for him and his band! Many Haitians of course knew of their African heritage, but were not aware of contemporary African musicians apart from, say, Youssou N'Dour.

On the gender dynamics in Haitian music, he noted that with the exception of the likes of Emeline Michel, males dominated. Few bands included women because women would be a distraction for the male band members and be a source of rampant friction and competition. A rather interesting take, I thought. In terms of the commercial aspects of the music business, he lamented that it was difficult to make money because of widespread piracy. Also, the youth who love music have no money to buy music. This is one reason musicians prefer to play Kompa, which is popular with older audiences, and are afraid of introducing innovations that may not appeal to them. And they all seek to break into the international market.

We concluded the discussion on the content of Haitian and his own music. He said that while his music focuses on the usual romantic lyrics, much of Haitian music, including Kompa, rural music, and Haitian hip hop, largely talks about poverty, misery, and the country's deplorable socio-economic conditions and unstable, violence-ridden politics. He sings fluently in Creole, French, and English, which is essential for any artist who seeks both national and international recognition. He often goes abroad; he had recently been at a concert in Canada, but he does not intend to live abroad. On his most recent trip to Canada, he was struck by the different reception accorded to Haitian and African music at another concert. The Haitian concert was mostly attended by the Haitian diaspora while the African concert attracted a much larger and more diverse audience, including many white Canadians. That showed the challenges Haitian music has to overcome internationally.

At the end he gave me a copy of his latest CD, on which he wrote, "you are a teacher; go teach my culture through my music." I can't wait to listen to it. He also wrote on the jacket of the CD two websites, including YouTube, where I could get more of his music and information. He was accompanied during the interview by one member of his band, John Mogéne, the composer of most of the songs on the CD I had been given, as I later found out, and the best bass player in the country, according to Bic. John would occasionally nod and exclaim in agreement, but did not say much during the interview.

The interview was conducted at the reception of the studio. We walked out of the building together. Bic and John went into their Range Rover, while we stood on the road waiting for a tap tap. Katia left me at the Villa. She was already pleased with herself, that she had been able to arrange so many different interviews in Port-au-Prince. She was very excited about the trip to Cap Haitien tomorrow.

She had come to the Villa at 2:30 p.m. so that we could go to the travel agent and purchase tickets to Cap Haitien. She called several friends, but couldn't find a travel agent at all the places we were told to go to in Pétionville and on Delmas Street. We finally gave up as we came closer to the time of our appointment with Bic. We will get the tickets at the airport tomorrow morning. We plan to take an early morning flight.

July 21, 2007

As is often the case when I know I have to wake up early I did not sleep well last night and this morning I woke up before the alarm went off at 6:30 a.m. I went to the reception and took my credit card and debit card and a couple of hundred dollars from the safety deposit, as well as my passport. By 7:00 a.m. I was ready. Katia came on time, accompanied by a man, who I thought was the owner of the truck which would transport us, and two women.

We took the road toward downtown and then branched into a neighborhood with high, fenced walls and beautiful, spacious houses before we ended up on familiar Delmas Street. We stopped at one place to pick up a suitcase for one of the women. Although it was quite early, by my reckoning, and a weekend, the streets were already crowded. It had rained last night and the potholes were muddy. At the roundabout turning to the airport from Delmas Street, the situation was particularly bad as there were throngs of tap taps and people looking for transport and the ever-present vendors hawking and advertising all manner of goods. There is a small rectangular tower at the roundabout, each side proclaiming the words of the French revolution, *fraternity, liberty, equality*. A couple of the letters on two of the words were loose and hung a little crookedly.

We dropped off one of the women at the international terminal. We were not introduced and nobody really talked during the ride to the airport. As the woman disembarked, Katia explained that she was the driver's sister-in-law. The driver himself was not the owner of the vehicle, he was a friend of the owner who was Katia's friend but was unable to take us to the airport. The domestic terminal was several hundred meters away in a small building that looked like a large hangar.

Sure enough, we got our tickets. I counted the names of at least four airlines at the check-in counter. Ours was Carbintair, which also flew to Jérémie, our next destination on Monday. The ticketing was all done manually; there were no computers that I could see. The ticketing agents, all women, were friendly and efficient. A male attendant led us to the waiting area and found us seats at the back of the room where a large fan was blowing. We asked him to turn the fan away from us. The waiting room was so packed that many people, including a group of whites, were standing. Some of them were wearing those redemptive smiles of those of privilege who spend time in the Third World; the young women had gone a little native with braided hair. There were two white men speaking French—French Canadian, or Haitian, I wasn't sure—with a video camera shooting pictures. They were in a row in front of us next to a set of broken chairs, of which there were several. I hoped they would not point their camera in my direction, and that they were not on our flight.

Unfortunately, the two white men boarded the flight to Cap Haitien, a small crop duster, as we used to call them in Champaign and State College, seating 21 passengers. All seats were taken. The two white men sat in front and took each other's pictures when they were not taking pictures of the open cockpit or the spectacular landscape. At least they had the sense not to turn their video camera behind them.

The flight was remarkably short—23 minutes. It was smooth and pleasant. The scenery out of the windows, the hills and mountains and valleys, was extraordinary. From the sky, it all looked green; sparsely inhabited, with a brooding desolateness. As we began to descend, the mountains looked less green than bare; patches of green trees stood out as sore thumbs. We flew past the Citadel that we had come to see perched high and mighty

on the peak of one of the mountains surrounding Cap Haitien. Its aloof grandeur looked impressive. The same could not be said about the airport itself—a small, shoddy hangar of a building surrounded by dusty grounds except for the runway and the thin concrete walkways from the runways. Outside was a throng of people waiting for their loved ones.

We had not booked a place to stay. Katia tried before we left without much success. So we decided to take a chance. As we descended from the plane, she befriended a young man who might be able to help, and help he did. Although not from Cap Haitien, he knew the area well, and he took us to the checkout counter where we were given the line to the best hotel in town and Katia made a booking. The man also helped find a taxi and negotiated a good price for us.

The road near the airport is all gravel and very dusty. We soon joined the tarmac road and the dustiness gave way to scenes of incredible urban squalor. On both sides of the narrow streets downtown were shops and houses packed together and buildings that were either falling apart or under construction. The road to the hotel swung along the harbor. It provided some tranquil sights, and other less pleasant ones, including the rusty and rotting hulls of several abandoned ships and boats swaying heavily in the harbor. There were some fishing boats with fishermen pulling nets and larger ships unloading and loading cargo containers. From there we turned by the regional police headquarters and negotiated our way up a hill where Hotel Mont Joli stands facing the harbor and the town of Cap Haitien.

That's when we realized the taxi deal was not as good as we originally thought. When I pulled out Haitian \$20 (100 gourdes) the taxi driver said that he had quoted the price in U.S. dollars, seven times more! I grudgingly pulled a \$100 bill but the taxi driver didn't have change. So before we had even registered we asked for change from the reception. After I had given the driver his U.S. \$20, we asked how much it would be for him to take us to the Citadel. Three-hundred U.S. dollars, he said coolly. I gasped in shock. That was more than the cost of the two tickets from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitien (\$135 each). When I said no, he changed the fare to \$100, but I refused, annoyed at his obvious attempt to rip us off.

My room was ready, but Katia had to wait for hers for a while. It was a little after 11:00 and I decided to have breakfast. Katia joined me a little later. We were both tired and agreed to take some rest and meet in the open lobby/bar area around 2:30 p.m., at which time we would try to arrange for transport to the Citadel and also arrange for a meeting with the colleagues of Senator Roumer who Katia had contacted last week and agreed to meet.

I tried to watch some TV, hoping to catch some news before taking a nap. But the TV was not working. The room was large and it was appropriately cool from the rather noisy air conditioner. But the room was pervaded by a disturbing odor that you often get from old carpets in rundown motels. The room had brick tiles, was clean, and had a ceiling of shining, brown plywood. Maybe it was the bedding. But the sheets looked clean. There was no point in investigating further the source of the odor in the bedcover or mattress, so I decided to take my nap.

I must have been tired, for I fell into a deep sleep. By the time I woke up an hour and a half later I felt refreshed and invigorated, ready to see Cap Haitien and visit the Citadel. It was an hour before Katia and I had agreed to meet, so in the absence of TV or anything to read, I sat in the bar watching the harbor and the town, which from that distance looked mildly quaint. I wrote several messages on my Blackberry. I accidentally called Thandika Mkandawire to whom I was trying to send a message. He promptly called back and when I told him I was in Haiti, he immediately launched into an insightful commentary

on the need for African intellectuals to take the African diaspora seriously, that we have a deep moral and political responsibility to the diaspora. He told, a little disapprovingly, of meeting a Congolese colleague in Geneva who had worked in Haiti as part of the UN mission and couldn't wait to leave. He also recounted a talk he recently attended at Oxford University, in which the speaker kept ranting about Creole cultures and Thandika observed that all the Creole cultures and societies he was referring to were among the African diaspora, yet that hardly featured in his discussion. Thandika has the astonishing ability to capture the saliency of an issue with numbing simplicity. He is one of the most brilliant people I know, who I can listen to for hours and be dazzled by his sharp insights, all delivered with a self-deprecating sense of humor.

By 3:00 p.m., the light breakfast had worn off and so I decided to go to the restaurant and have a light snack. I ordered grilled fish served with plantains. It was delectable. Katia found me in the restaurant. She looked lively, saying the pounding headache she had been complaining of since morning had eased. She ordered the same dish. It was raining lightly, not heavy enough to leave the veranda of the restaurant facing the pool, but too heavy to walk around the town without umbrellas. She called several friends who knew people in Cap Haitien to arrange for transport, but to no avail. We learned that taxis going from the hotel at the foot of the mountains to the Citadel cost at least U.S. \$100, but it might not be advisable to go there with the drizzle. The colleague of Senator Roumer was not in Port-au-Prince! To imagine we had traveled all this way, he could have had the decency to let us know. But we were determined to salvage the trip. At the very least, we would visit the Citadel.

We sat on the veranda watching the scenery and the people, many of whom, Katia surmised from their Spanish and mannerisms, were from the Dominican Republic, and she reprised the discussion about the poor relations between people of the two countries. Haiti occupies one third of the island, the rest is the Dominican Republic. At issue are historical constructions of national identity, race, and modernity. Haiti is a predominantly black society—95% of its population, according to some estimates—and is the embodiment of blackness, a blackness that, in its heroic self-assertion and successful revolution, threatened the sanctity of white racial privilege which governed the slave and post-emancipation societies of the Americas; and which, in its perennial crises of underdevelopment, seemed to confirm the inherent inferiority of blackness that affirmed, if not white privilege, anti-black antipathy so deeply embedded in the racialized color codes and consciousness of the Americas. Sitting next to each other, it is not surprising that the animosity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, both real and rhetorical, are so palpable, paralyzing any possibility of partnership, let alone integration. The unification of the island under Haitian rulers in the nineteenth century inspired fear and loathing on the Dominican side rather than motivation for unification or mutual accommodation and respect.

I was so full from the fish and plantains that in the evening I did not return to the restaurant for dinner. Katia saved her leftovers for her dinner. I only came down to the lobby/bar area briefly around 7:00 p.m. where I found Katia happily talking to other hotel guests. She had met a Haitian filmmaker who she thought I would enjoy talking to. She had also managed to arrange for transport to the Citadel for U.S. \$100 through one of the waiters. I was impressed by her resourcefulness. She was unusually excited, even ecstatic, as she told me of the arrangements and the people she talked to once I left her a few hours earlier in the restaurant. She looked proudly at the lights flickering in the calm waters by the harbor and stated with infectious pride, "it is beautiful."

I couldn't have agreed with her more. In the cool breeze of the evening air and tranquility occasionally broken by the pulsating sounds of Kompa music from the streets below, it all indeed seemed beautiful. When I got back to the room half an hour later, even the TV had been fixed and I could watch television. Thankfully, I wasn't confined to CNN. I caught an original HBO presentation of Bill Maher's politically charged, morally irreverent humor. He was in top form, castigating and lampooning Bush and his coterie of incompetent, delusional, and dangerous neocon acolytes, the hypocritical morality of religious conservatives, and the idiotic gullibility of the American public. It was classic Bill Maher, sharp, sardonic, scathing, hilarious.

July 22, 2007

The driver taking us to the Citadel came at 8:00 a.m. as arranged between Katia and the waiter, a friendly young man eager to be of service to a young woman who he seemed to have taken a liking to. The waiter found us in the restaurant eating breakfast. Katia had joined me after I had already ordered and told me of more people she had talked to after I retired to my room.

Sitting next to my table was the filmmaker she had pointed out to me the previous evening. A burly, tall man with mid-size locks looking like unkempt hair, he sported a white beard and made a few remarks to the two people sitting next to him: a white man with spiked, oily hair who did most of the talking, and a white woman wearing a ponytail and shorts who was busy sharing her food with what looked like stray cats, a spectacle I found quite unappetizing. They were discussing a script, how to stage a shooting. On another table, there were six or seven men discussing religion. The four white men were clearly American evangelicals going by their speech and demeanor, while the two or three black men were their eager, local interlocutors. I kept switching between the conversations at the two tables, of earthly sins depicted on camera and heavenly salvation revealed in the Bible. When Katia joined me, a third conversation intruded.

The taxi driver came with a friend. Both seemed quite friendly and pleased to be taking us to the Citadel for some serious change. The drive through the city was depressing in its ugliness. It was unbelievably dirty. I have never seen anything like it. There is a river we crossed that looked like a sewer, on its banks hang rickety shacks and mounds of garbage. At that time of the morning the streets were already crowded with people walking in all directions or standing outside their homes; some women were squatted in front of charcoal ovens frying food.

A quarter of an hour or so later, we finally left the city and drove through the countryside, which was a lot more agreeable, more pleasant, more tranquil, more livable. The buildings were sparser and smaller, but more colorful. They were painted in green, pink, peach, brown, yellow, or orange colors. Sometimes the doors and window frames were painted a different color than the walls. The houses were built on cement blocks, but the higher into the mountain we went, we saw many that were built with bamboo poles, sometimes bare, and sometimes plastered with mud. The humble ones looked no better than shacks and pens for livestock. Most of the houses had roofs of corrugated iron in varying shades of newness and rustiness. The truly poor houses were covered with plastic.

This being Sunday, there were a lot of people walking to and from church in their Sunday best, clasping their Bibles; couples and families, some of the men in ties and

the women in long dresses or two-piece suits; and the kids in well-pressed shirts and trousers for the boys and flowery dresses for the girls, sometimes accompanied by colorful ponytails. Many were walking, but a few rode bicycles or motorcycles, sometimes carrying two, three, or even four people; usually a man and a woman and their children squeezed between them. I recall most vividly a man with a small boy, who was no more than three, clutched in front of him as he rode carefully on the side of the road, and a woman holding her baby tightly as her husband zigzagged to avoid potholes. In the meantime, outside the houses we saw washing hanging out to dry, groups of men gathered around tree sheds playing games of cards, and women dashing in and out with utensils and bags. The houses were mostly surrounded by bushy fruit trees, especially mangoes, bananas, and sometimes sugar cane. Occasionally we saw tethered goats feasting on the ample vegetation, sometimes even a cow, and I saw a couple of sheep and several pigs scavenging in the rather sparing garbage mounds outside the more concentrated neighborhoods. We passed through a few communal boreholes, at two of which we saw women happily washing themselves, naked from the abdomen up. And from time to time, we would come across men and women carrying large bags or basins full of goods, mostly vegetables and fruits.

It took close to an hour to get to the foot of the mountain where the Citadel is built. The ruins of the large palace constructed by Christophe, the same ruler who built the Citadel, are located here. To visit the ruins you have to pay a fee, which we did, but decided to visit them on our way back from the Citadel. Next to the ruins is a large round church in which a service was being held. We heard the booming voice of the priest and the hearty singing of the parishioners.

From here to the end of the road, a 20-minute walk from the Citadel, the road was the best we had driven since we left the hotel. It was paved with stone. From the ruins of the Citadel was a journey of five kilometers; this is where the taxi driver who had demanded U.S. \$300 had promised to leave us and wait. The absurdity of his offer became clearer as the van slowly groaned its way up the hill, stalling on several occasions. Before getting to the ruins of the palace, we had a flat tire and I feared we might encounter something a lot worse. But we made it to the final stop. There were several cars, mostly 4x4s, and dozens of horses and donkeys, as well as riders and guides ready to take people to the Citadel. We declined the animals but took a guide with us.

The 20 minutes to the Citadel was grueling. The path, made of the same stone as the road, was not the problem. It was the incline. Walking up the mountain, each step felt like a test of endurance. I was puffing like a tired, old dog. I marveled at the people who lived in the hills who walked with ease and casualness. Behind me, Katia was sweating as she pulled herself one step at a time. The driver and his friend didn't appear to be in much better shape, which was a small consolation for me. The guide was understanding and crawled along in front of us, trying to explain what we were seeing in front and across from us—I didn't pay him any attention. The idea of riding a horse or donkey did not seem so silly anymore. The ordeal became even harder when the guide suggested a shortcut to the Citadel. Several times as we waded through the rock and shrubs, I sat down, out of breath, and wondering what would happen if I collapsed from exhaustion. The last time I had walked up a mountain was in secondary school as a member of the mountaineers club. I quit the club when we got back to the school. And that mountain was not even as high as this one. Admittedly, we hadn't walked all the way from its foot, but hey, I am 52!

After what seemed like an eternity, we made it to the Citadel, a truly impressive fortress declared many years ago a World Heritage site by UNESCO. It was huge, rising to at least eight stories. From its rooftop, you can see the entire valley all the way to the sea. It is truly a magnificent site, a fitting monument to a besieged state. Constructing it apparently took fourteen years. We walked through the seven or eight floors, across the vast rooms and corridors that two centuries ago hummed with state power for the newly independent African diasporan nation, with Christophe at the head. We saw the huge cannons facing potential enemies who might come from the sea, the residential quarters of the soldiers, the private quarters of Christophe and his chapel, and the rooftop aqueducts to capture rain water which look as intact today as they did when they were first built. There were openings in the roofs for light and the rooms were cool, not only because they were high up in the mountain, but because of the air circulation. Christophe committed suicide in 1820 after years of frustration from a debilitating illness. He was buried in the palace but the guide said nobody is exactly sure where. The tomb of his wife, a huge white mausoleum, is clearly marked, however. It was a marvel to think of how the castle was built two centuries ago, how the heavy iron and brass cannons were hauled from the sea many miles away. It stands as an impressive, brooding reminder of Haiti's possibilities two hundred years ago. In its decline and abandonment, and especially the destruction of the palace below the hill, which looks like ruins from several millennia back, it embodies, quite poignantly, the unfulfilled dreams of Haiti's founders.

Before we left the Citadel we went to a small shop, but there were only a few postcards and two crumpled books on the Citadel—a remarkable testament to the underdevelopment of tourism, and, more troubling for me, of the burden of memory, a will to flee history. It was gratifying as we came down the path from the Citadel to see dozens of people, mostly Haitian, trudging their way up, on horses or donkeys—a more intelligent way than we had attempted—to pay homage to the unfulfilled promises of power and greatness embodied by the Citadel. There were only sprinklings of white tourists. That restored my faith in public history, the lack of tourist razzmatazz, a silent tribute to the enduring resilience of the Haitian nation.

The walk down the hill was a breeze. I could now enjoy the vista of the majestic landscape, hear the drums and music coming from the distant villages in the valley below, soak in the layers of undulating mountains as far as the eye could see, their green foliage occasionally broken by streams of red soil. Two hundred years ago, the sights of the hills and mountains fully clothed with trees must have been even more awesome to the men and women, rulers and ruled, who traveled to and from the Citadel.

By the time we got to the ruins of the palace at the foothills, it was around 1:00 p.m., so we decided to pass walking through the palace. We stopped shortly for me to take some pictures. As we drove down, several people, mostly youth jumped on the back of the truck as they had done on our way up, not heeding the protestations of the driver and his friend. Clearly, this was a source of great fun for the youths. The grownups, including the woman with the bags of fruits and vegetables, asked for a lift when we stopped for me to take pictures of the ruins of the palace. We dropped her in Cap Haitien, together with two young men who had asked for a ride when we first left the parking station below the Citadel.

By the time we got back to the hotel, we had less than an hour to get to the airport for our 3:45 p.m. flight back to Port-au-Prince. The plane was delayed more than half an hour, which meant we were at the airport for a little less than two hours sitting in the hangar that served as the lounge. Fortunately, although the fans were off, it was cool. It helped that the windows and the door to the runaway were open. But coming from the

ultra-security-conscious, post-9/11 America, the openness of the door to the runway was surprising.

Having nothing better to do, nothing to read, and not really too keen on talking, I focused my attention on the waiting passengers, trying to fathom what their lives were like. There was the little girl, perhaps three, in a green top, jean skirt and white shoes, who suddenly started peeing down her legs to the irritation and annoyance of her parents, but neither of them said anything to her; the worker went to the corner and brought a mop to wipe the urine. There was the fat man in light green shorts and a matching multicolored shirt tapping the wall next to the open door and moving his body when he was not scratching himself on his crotch. There was the woman in a blue blouse and tight jeans lying on the floor on top of a garment bag napping. There was the young white couple, in their mid or late twenties, the man wearing a blue Adidas T-shirt and the woman, a strapless light blue top holding a sleeping black baby. Several people would occasionally steal glances. Probably an adopted baby, I whispered to Katia when she came back from walking around. There was the woman in brown pants and blouse and permed hair eagerly taking pictures of the four dangling photographs of Haitian leaders against the wall—Pétion, Christophe, and L'Ouverture on one side and Dessalines on the other. There was the fine looking sister with a band around her hair extensions wearing a black and white top and a white necklace talking on her cell phone or staring outside. There was the woman in a black shirt and denim skirt breastfeeding her baby. At one time, she forgot to cover her breast with the cloth hanging on her left shoulder before she quickly realized her folly. There was the young boy, perhaps seven, with unusually big eyes, running up and down the hangar and followed by two younger kids happily sucking on his bottle of Fiesta soda. There was the young man with a slight scar on his left cheek, wearing an oversized T-shirt with a red lining on the collars and red baggy pants, a red cap resting on his knees, a gold ring, and a big silver chain around his neck, trying hard to look like a mean hip hop gangster. His hair was braided. Katia said he was a radio journalist who had been in jail for having sex with a fourteen-year-old girl. Was it all over the news, I asked. No, she knew of this case from the Quartier Populaire where she used to live. Then there were the two light-skinned, stylishly dressed women who entered the waiting area just before the plane was scheduled to leave and stood by the door. One was wearing a red suit with white spots, brown shoes, and matching handbag. The other was wearing tight-fitting blue jeans, a silk green top, brown leather sandals, and carrying a black bag. We sat next to them on the plane. This time the plane was half empty. Our journey was as smooth as before.

Port-au-Prince suddenly looked different upon return. The airport—the domestic terminal that had looked so small yesterday—suddenly looked bigger, the streets less filthy, the city much more cosmopolitan than it had looked yesterday morning and for the past two and half weeks. Even the taxi ride seemed surprisingly cheap, \$20 to the Villa. But before we got to the Villa, they started complaining that they didn't know I was going so far; had they known they would have charged me at least double, Katia whispered to me as I left the taxi. She asked them to drop her by the main road to take a tap tap. They reluctantly agreed.

By then I had made up my mind that the trip to Jérémie was off, I was tired and did not cherish the idea of waking up for another early morning flight. Besides, the trip to Jérémie was to see Renate's school. The trip to Cap Haitien had cost me \$600 altogether. This was \$100 more than my earmarked travel budget to Haiti. But I did not have the heart to tell Katia of my decision as she left. I had told her while at the airport in Cap Haitien I would need to check my finances before we could be sure of the trip to Jérémie tomorrow morning. I waited a couple of hours before I broke the news to her. Her voice

didn't betray any strong disappointment. When I suggested she could spend tomorrow finalizing the transcriptions of the interviews she sighed with relief.

After our stay in Cap Haitien, the Villa looked like a five-star hotel. The policeman with his gun looked friendly. Every major establishment in Port-au-Prince seems to have guards around with guns. And when I got to the room, it smelled heavenly. The shower was refreshing, not the dribble from the rusty, disgusting shower head at the Hotel Mont Joli. I didn't even mind when the lights went out several times a night, as they often do throughout the day, for they came back once the hotel generator kicks on within a minute. In her neighborhood, Katia says, they can sometimes be without electricity for up to two weeks, even a month. And I was not in the least perturbed when I went to the restaurant and sat by myself and had nobody to talk to and waited forever to be served. I was back in the great city of Port-au-Prince, away from the provincial backwater of Cap Haitien. I was relieved, but my tourist, elitist attitude worried me. I was behaving no differently from all those who despise poverty-stricken Africa. But does solidarity, or empathy, mean ignoring the social and material decay and deprivations of a society suffering from decades of misgovernment and maldistribution of wealth? Is poverty a license for filth? Is it an alibi for squalor and indifference to hygiene and cleanliness as I had seen in Cap Haitien and in Quartier Populaire? I was too tired for answers. All I could think of was that many desperately poor villages in Malawi are a lot cleaner than this.

July 23, 2007

This was a rather inactive day, deservedly so I thought after the trip to Cap Haitien over the weekend. Nothing was planned since the cancellation of the trip to Jérémie last night. I had planned to sleep until mid-morning, but I was woken up by the phone just after 8:00 a.m., to my annoyance. I didn't answer but couldn't go back to sleep. I tried to watch the American morning TV shows in bed but that hardly lasted ten minutes, so I opted for the next best thing. I switched on my computer, got on the Internet, and ordered breakfast.

I lingered in the room for much of the morning, then walked around the Villa, skipped lunch, and answered some e-mail. I promptly answered the message from Chris Comer, the outgoing dean at UIC, thanking me for giving him copies of the two volumes of *The Study of Africa*, which he says he is looking forward to reading after his deanship ends on August 15. More importantly, he informed me that the provost had finally approved the college's new honorific title, Liberal Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor, for which I will be the first recipient. He apologized that it had taken so long, but it would finally be announced within a week or so. It is amazing how we all seem to crave recognition of some sort—that's what all these titles, awards, and prizes in various walks of life are all about—recognition. Having had my final academic promotion to full professor twelve years ago, this represents a kind of career advancement.

I also got a surprising e-mail from Gabeba Baderon, the South African poet based at Penn State with her husband. She complimented me on Volume 1 of *The Study of Africa*, which she said was helping her in designing a course entitled *Introduction to Modern Africa* that she will be teaching next year for the Department of African and African American Studies, the same department I couldn't stand. I mentioned to her that I had read her essay on poetry in the *Mail* and *Guardian* on my flight from Johannesburg at

the end of last month. She promptly wrote back to tell me about the Cape Town Book Fair she had attended around that time and a project she wanted to work on focusing on sexuality in which she hopes I might be interested.

There was a message from James Currey Publishers with a few editorial queries for the *Conflicts* book. I was tempted to work on that but decided against it; it can wait until I return to Chicago later this week. And so the day went. It rained again in the evening. I decided to stay in and ordered room service and settled to flipping channels from one silly show to another, never spending more than a few minutes on any. I had run out of reading materials. It was time to return to Chicago. Save for the time I walked around the Villa, the day felt like I had already left Haiti. Modern communication technologies from TV to the Internet do indeed enhance, if not the reality, then at least the illusion, of the substitutability of spaces, and the ability to experience multiple places simultaneously.

July 24, 2007

I was back in Haiti on my last day of a remarkable three weeks. Katia came by around 11:00 a.m. She looked rested and happy. She is a sweet young woman, always smiling, always trying to help, eager and anxious to do a good job. We began reminiscing about what had been achieved; she talked about how much she had learned about her country from the interviews we had conducted and places we had visited. How grateful she was to me for giving her this rare opportunity and to her brother, Nixon, in Chicago, who had introduced me to her.

We had one last interview today with the economist we missed last week. The interview was at 2:00 p.m. but I had asked Katia to come early so that we could work on the administrative aspects of the project—payment, transcripts—as well as for her to take me shopping for paintings and maybe gifts. Calculating the hours she had worked proved straightforward, for she kept a meticulous record; it took a little longer to get a receipt worked out, typed, and printed. I had to borrow the computer at the reception after the computer in the business office failed to print. She handed me two disks containing all the interviews and showed me how to use the digital tape recorder that I had brought specifically for this project—an amazing little gadget that could record more than 30 hours in multiple files which could be downloaded onto a computer and copied to a disk. It's amazing how quickly young people can figure out electronic equipment; it would have taken me forever to figure this thing out by myself.

By the time we finished with business, it was already noon. Katia didn't feel like eating anything, neither did I since I had eaten breakfast that morning. Katia seems quite conscious of her weight and rarely eats when she is with me. She says she has been overweight since she was little. She is so top-heavy that she sometimes walks like a woman a few years older than she is. But all this is eclipsed by her cheerfulness, warmth, and intelligence.

Every day on our way to and from the hotel, we pass through a post with armed guards who are supposed to protect the Villa, another adjacent hotel called El Rancho, and a high class gym nearby, or so I presumed. Next to the post are rows of paintings hanging on the walls shielding the adjacent buildings from the road. That's where we first stopped. This was street art, tourist art; quite formulaic, depicting predictable scenes—market women, men on fishing boats, rural landscapes, idealized faces, nothing terribly original,

but vibrant, energetic, inviting, even impressive, nonetheless. They came in all sizes and with varied levels of artistic accomplishment. If I could not afford a Tiga or a Dodard, I joked to Katia, at least I could afford one of these paintings to remind me of Haiti's vivacious arts scene where paintings light up grim street corners, where creativity lends beauty to the ugliness of subsistence survival.

Two paintings in particular caught my eye, both large canvasses, perhaps four to five feet in length and three feet wide; one representing contorted, semi-abstract, elongated figures of men, and the other of market women. They were striking, loud in a subdued sort of way, and subtly evocative of communal bonds, the conviviality of male and female solidarities among ordinary working folk. The vendor wanted U.S. \$300 for both of them. Katia protested vigorously, but he would not budge. He thinks you are a tourist or with the UN and you have a lot of money, she said. I understood, and we walked away. But the two paintings remained on my mind as we walked around Pétionville checking out street art. There was no point in going into the numerous art galleries, some of which we had previously visited, for I did not have art gallery money.

The search for paintings had not succeeded by the time we went to meet the economist at his consultancy firm. I could not have wished for a more befitting conclusion to my research visit to Haiti. Kesner Pharel was simply brilliant. His knowledge of the Haitian economy was encyclopedic, his commitment to the development of his beloved country was anguishing and simultaneously uplifting in its passion. He restored my faith in Haiti's possibilities, that with people like him, the future can happen, a bright future. He reminded me of Thandika. They actually looked alike physically, the above-average height, the expressive face, the intensity often broken with a mischievous laugh. His hair was graying, but I reckoned he was younger than me.

His discussion, which was entirely in English, had the systematic delivery of a well-researched lecture. He presents a weekly radio program on the Haitian economy. He is committed to raising the levels of financial literacy among ordinary Haitians who tend to be attracted to politics and the public sector while the economy is controlled by the tiny mulatto elite. His consultancy is only one of three controlled by black Haitians, he observed ruefully.

He began with a synopsis of the current economic situation in Haiti. The facts are familiar, but he gave them life, indignation: 4 million Haitians live on less than \$1 a day; 7 million out of 8 million people in the country live on less than \$2 a day. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It wasn't of course always so. Haiti was once, in the days of plantation slavery, the richest island in the Caribbean, the bedrock of the French economy. Then independence came and Haiti was encircled and punished by antagonistic powers fearful of the Haitian example: the French demanded a huge, crippling indemnity, the U.S. imposed an embargo, and the beleaguered new republic was forced to focus its energies on preserving its independence, which undermined development, a situation aggravated by the limited vision and capabilities of the country's quarrelsome and myopic leaders.

A new economic period started with the American occupation, during which some modern economic infrastructure and institutions were put in place. The 1940s and 1950s marked the best time for the country, economically. The U.S. occupation had ended. There was political stability. Investments flowed. But this did not last. In 1957, Papa Doc Duvalier came to power. Although he built some new infrastructure, such as the airport and hydropower, this was a dictatorship. The regime spent most of its energy and resources

fighting its opponents. When Baby Doc Duvalier took over in the 1970s, he attempted economic revitalization and initially tried to open up the political system, slightly. Economic growth accelerated, reaching 5% per annum. American and other foreign investment increased. The financial sector in particular saw rapid development, as did the assembly and import substitution manufacturing sector.

But the situation soon began to deteriorate. The political situation had failed to keep pace with the economic changes and deep tensions persisted. Economically, the oil shock combined with the sharp fall in agricultural prices led to falling terms of trade for Haiti. American fiscal interventions, combined with political pressures by the Carter Administration, brought matters to a boil—the Haitian currency tumbled. Efforts by Baby Doc Duvalier in 1980–1985 to maintain the economy afloat and contain the political crisis proved unsuccessful and he fell from power in 1985. Thus, the combined specter of economic and political crises succeeded in overturning the Duvalier dictatorship that had lasted for 28 years. The early to mid-1980s also saw the collapse of the tourism industry, which had enjoyed considerable growth in the 1960s and 1970s; and finally the HIV/AIDS pandemic began to unfold and Haiti was blamed as one of the sources of the disease.

The country virtually stagnated between 1985 and 1990. Coups became notoriously frequent and governments changed every few months. Under such circumstances, investments dried up. Aristide came to power, but within seven months, in October 1991, he was overthrown in a military coup. For the next four years, an international embargo was imposed against Haiti. By the time Aristide was reinstated in 1995, the GDP had contracted by 20%, while the population was growing steadily at an annual rate of 2%. The result was growing unemployment and deepening poverty. Inflation and public deficits skyrocketed, while public services deteriorated. Only 30–40% of the population had access to electricity, 50% had access to schools, and 1% of the active population had a university degree.

The gross underdevelopment of human resources was exacerbated by rising brain drain as the middle-class, educated elites fled rising insecurity and plummeting living standards. There is a joke in Haiti that there are three types of Haitian emigrants: the boat people who flee on rickety boats, the feet people who walk into the Dominican Republic, and the Boeing people who have visas to enter the developed countries, including the U.S. and Canada. The problem facing Haiti during this period was not confined to the incompetencies and incapacities of the public sector; the private sector lacked vision and commitment to long-term investment and development. Haiti descended to a new level of political crisis in 2000–2004 when struggles among political parties and factions intensified. This culminated in the ouster of Aristide. The economy contracted at the annual rate of 0.6% while the population continued to grow. The result is the poverty and squalor you see all around the country, including Port-au-Prince, Cap Haitien, and other cities.

Haiti deserves to be considered a failed state, Kesner maintained. Last year it ranked 8th in the index of such states; this year it ranks 11th. Its index for corruption is higher, while it is very low for competitiveness. It will not be easy for Haiti to overcome the underdevelopment of its human, material, and financial resources. Critical for Haiti to get out of its perennial crises is to solve its political conflicts, to develop strong institutions, and for all stakeholders to work together. Haitians need to learn how to cooperate, to manage conflict. Currently, politicians don't seem to know what to do and the institutions

are weak—parliament, the judiciary, and the prime minister's office. The political, private, and social sectors, and local and international forces often work at cross purposes. Domestically, the domination of the economy by the mulattoes—who constitute 1–2% of the population but control 50% of the GDP—is both unproductive and unsustainable and one of the reasons for the country's instability. The black majority needs to be more economically involved and more financially literate.

As for the international dimension, Haiti is now a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), but this is of little economic benefit, even if it is politically good. CARICOM is composed of small countries and weak economies. The U.S. market is far more important for Haiti. But the U.S. is now currently preoccupied with the Middle East. New players have emerged whose economic importance for Haiti is growing. These countries include Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Previously, besides the U.S., the main international players were France and Canada. Collectively, the international players have so much influence over Haiti—including its elections—that Haiti could not be considered a fully sovereign country.

Also crucial is the Haitian diaspora that remits \$1.6 billion. But much of this money is used for consumption rather than productive investment. Some from the diaspora come back to resettle or invest but tend to lose money because they don't fully understand how the economy works. Kesner proposed that diaspora investment could be increased if remittances were made tax deductible in the rich countries; this echoed similar proposals made by the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) in the UK, I told him. The diaspora could also assist in making Haiti less linguistically isolated in the region. A scheme could be introduced whereby Haitian diaspora students could be encouraged to come and work in Haiti after their studies in exchange for exemption from repaying their tuition. All these were quite intriguing proposals, which would require the agreement of the developing countries hosting the diasporas from countries like Haiti, I thought.

On economic relations between Haiti and Africa, he noted that they were poorly developed, but could be improved. He felt, however, that Haiti shared much in common with African countries in terms of their economic problems and challenges. He said he would love to visit the continent and host seminars in Haiti between Haitian and African economists to compare experiences and learn useful lessons.

It was a great conversation. He lived up to the advance billing offered by Renate and Katia, who listened to him on the radio regularly but had not met him in person until today. Toward the end of the meeting, Kesner called in a Haitian student studying for an MBA at Columbia who seemed to provide a living embodiment of Kesner's thesis that black Haitians needed to develop financial literacy. The student, a young man in his mid-twenties, beamed and nodded as Kesner expounded on the Haitian economic situation and ways it might be resolved.

As we walked back, I was a little ecstatic, partly because my last scheduled interview had gone so well and also because this was my last day in the country. We reminisced about the highlights of the past three weeks. My only major regret is that we had not been able to get women to talk with us. I found that deeply troubling and wondered whether it was a reflection of Katia's limitations in securing such women, or a reflection of gender imbalances in Haitian society itself. All the women she had contacted had declined; the rector I had e-mailed hadn't even bothered to respond.

On the way, we ran into a vendor selling music CDs and we bought a dozen CDs of Kompa music from him. Katia did the selections, saying she chose old and new Kompa

recordings to give me a good sample of this genre of Haitian music. I also decided to indulge myself a little by having my shoes polished. I was getting a little anxious about the bundle of Haitian money I was carrying and wanted to spend it as much as possible for it would be hard to change it back into U.S. dollars or take it with me to the U.S.

Katia suggested we take a tap tap and resume looking for artwork on the road going downtown. I wanted us to try our luck one more time with the art vendor on the way to the hotel. I enjoy haggling; it makes shopping a convivial social activity rather than a purely commercial transaction, a cold exchange of cash and commodities. And the vendor was a good haggler. We went back and forth between his original \$300 and my offer of half of that amount. In the end, he got \$250, but I got an additional four paintings in the bargain, on top of the original two I had selected earlier. It was a slow, playful exchange, which we both seemed to enjoy. We both thought we got a good deal. Katia and I bade each other farewell at the entrance of the Villa. She gave me a kiss on the cheek and wished me a safe flight. She asked if she could accompany me to the airport; I said that was not necessary. I thanked her for her work and her wonderful companionship.

I spent the evening packing and reflecting on the visit. It has been an incredible visit; aroused unusually powerful emotions, both positive and negative, much as I feel and react to Africa. In this sense, Haiti for me does indeed embody Africa, not only in the Africanness of its people, but in the painful trajectory of its modern history; in the triumph of its struggles and tragedies of its sacrifices; in the unfulfilled promises of its independence from the European barbarism of slavery and colonialism, combined with the myopic crassness, corruption, and incompetence of its rulers. In this mood of somber reflection, I did not feel like going to the restaurant to watch the customers made up mostly of UN officials and local Haitian elites, mixed with a sprinkling of white tourists and missionary do-gooders. And so I ordered room service for my last supper in the land of L'Ouverture, the great Ibo-descended military and political strategist, perhaps the greatest African American of all time.

July 25, 2007

I spent a rather restless night and woke up long before the time set up for the alarm. By 7:00 a.m., I was practically ready. Instead of going to the restaurant for breakfast, I treated myself to the mangoes I had bought yesterday on the way from Kesner's office. They were some of the sweetest and juiciest mangoes I have ever eaten. That's one advantage of the tropics—the gastronomic richness of its fruits and foods.

Half an hour later, I went to the reception to settle my bill. The taxi driver came promptly at 8:00 a.m. I bade farewell to the reception staff that I had grown to like over the past three weeks, all young men and women in their twenties; friendly and efficient. One of them said, "I hope you come back." The taxi driver was equally friendly, but we did not talk much on the way to the airport. We had agreed to the fare in advance and it was a reasonable \$30.

Negotiating through the airport was far less onerous than it is in the U.S. To begin with, there was only one flight so the lines were relatively short, although I was approached by some airport workers who proposed they could get me in front of the line for a little fee. The informal economy is indeed alive and well even at the airport! We went through

security twice: American Airlines had their own security checkpoint in addition to the first one I went through when I first checked in. The woman sitting next to the security machine shouted: shoes, belts, take them off! She looked stern, like her entire future was on the line if she did not pronounce those words with the appropriate gravity.

The departure lounge was already filling up when I got there. Having nothing to read, I settled to answering e-mails on my Blackberry. I had looked for newspapers and magazines in the two duty-free shops earlier and found nothing appealing because everything was in French. The more I travel the more I appreciate the need for multilingualism. I told Tiya the day he called me at the hotel that I regretted that I had not continued studying French when I went to college. He and I were the only two students who did O-level French at St. Patrick's Secondary School. He pursued French in college and is now fluent; not least helped by the years he spent in Geneva working at the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

The flight left on time. This time I was in the economy class and sat sandwiched between a teenage girl holding on possessively to her bag in the aisle seat and a man holding on tightly to his baby boy in the window seat. I dozed off-and-on during the flight. They served us drinks and two miserly crackers and cheese; it's criminal how they don't feed you properly on these flights. The flight was mostly filled with Haitians returning to the U.S. Some were clearly part of the diaspora. The girl and man sitting next to me had American passports, a couple in the next aisle pulled out Canadian passports when the flight attendants passed out immigration forms. Several people with Haitian passports asked the flight attendant to help them fill out their forms, which she cheerfully did. These were mostly older people, both men and women, and the attendant spoke to them in Creole.

Two hours later, we arrived in Ft. Lauderdale. My memories of the airport from 2001, when Cassandra and I boarded a Caribbean cruise there, was of a steamy and smelly airport. Today, the international arrivals section where we disembarked was unpleasant in its own distinct way. Right from the door into the building, we were asked to form a line leading to the immigration hall where new lines were formed. There were only four or five immigration officials on duty. It seemed as if everything was designed to emphasize that the human cargo from the Caribbean and South America were unwanted. To service the people just from our flight seemed to take forever. It took some 90 minutes to finally clear customs. By the time I picked up my baggage and dashed out of the airport, I had only five minutes before my scheduled call with Dwight McBride, our new dean, on a faculty retention issue.

I dashed out of Terminal 4 to Terminal 3 for my connecting flight. By 3:30 p.m., I had rechecked my bag and found myself a quiet corner to take Dwight's call. A couple of minutes later he called. We both lamented how the two faculty we were discussing sought counter-offers every so often, in this case even before the most recent counter-offer made in the spring has even taken effect! Oh, the madness of American academic capitalism.

As I was waiting for the flight to Chicago, Natasha called to say one of her former workmates, Rickey, had died last Saturday and they were going to view his body before it was taken to Memphis for burial. He had a heart condition. Apparently, he was expected at work on Saturday and when he didn't turn up and respond to calls someone went to his house where they found him dead. His wife had just left him together with his daughters, one who had recently completed high school and another who was six years old. A little over half an hour later Natasha called again, crying and sobbing. This is the first dead

body she has seen. I let her pour out her emotions, her fears, and tried to comfort her with words of empathy about the meaning of life and death, how the death of people we have known, even casually, reminds us of our own mortality, and concentrates our minds, even if temporarily, to live deeper, more connected lives. It occurred to me how sheltered Natasha has been from certain realities of life including death. Of course, she has heard of the deaths of relatives, including her Aunt Joyce, my beloved and only sister. But these were distant deaths, in that she was not at the funeral. This is one of the costs of growing up scattered away from family. Children of itinerant migrants like me sometimes pay this high price.

For the three-hours-plus flight from Fort Lauderdale to Chicago, I had an aisle seat, which I always prefer—I don't have to ask anybody's permission to go the bathroom! In this case it was godsend because next to me was a heavy-set woman who could hardly fit in her seat. She was one of those garrulous people who enjoy talking about their lives to whoever is unfortunate enough to sit next to them. Fortunately, she had no interest whatsoever in talking to me. But for the entire flight she tortured the poor woman next to her with stories of her worldwide travels—Europe from the Mediterranean to the north, Africa from Senegal to the Sphinx and fair Cape, Asia and the Middle East, not to mention the Caribbean, Canada, and Alaska—she had been everywhere. She embodied the whiteness of travel I have been thinking of writing about for a while, the possessive consumption of places, the capacity, at once racialized and class based, to traverse diverse places and claim intimate familiarity with them from superficial tours, the spatialized power to be everywhere, welcomed everywhere, held on a pedestal everywhere, experience the world on one's own cultural terms everywhere. She was exhausting and I was immensely relieved when we landed at O'Hare just a little after 8:00 p.m., nearly half an hour later than originally scheduled, and twelve hours after I left Villa Creole in Port-au-Prince.

I took a taxi from the airport and headed to the bright, dazzling lights of Chicago and my apartment in the south loop at University Village. It felt far from Port-au-Prince, very far in space and time. Two hundred years ago Chicago did not even exist, Port-au-Prince did. Two hundred years ago, the United States was a young republic, a slave-holding republic, while Haiti was a newly liberated, post-slave society. The historical connections between Chicago and Haiti go to the very founding of the city. The founder of the city was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, generally thought to be from Haiti, who settled in what became Chicago in the 1780s.

The struggle between the European slave masters and the enslaved Africans continues. The developmental gap between the United States and Haiti captures poignantly the continuing inequalities amongst the descendants of the Europeans and the Africans in the Atlantic world. I arrived home after 9:00 p.m. This marked the end of my trip to Haiti and the beginning of the difficult process of making sense of all that I had seen, felt, experienced, and thought while I was on that remarkable island.

2008

Mexico

June 8, 2008

Back to the diaspora. It was a short night, barely three hours of sleep and the alarm woke me up at 4:30 a.m. I had taken a shower before going to bed a little after 1:00 a.m., so all I had to do was shave my head and beard and pack my toiletries. It has been a long weekend trying to finish revisions to four papers, one on migrations, one on the African diaspora for *African Sociological Review*, edited by Fred Hendricks at Rhodes, one on China and Africa, and the last on African studies and universities for *Transition*, edited by Abiola Irele at Harvard.

The taxi driver came at exactly 5:15 a.m. It was already light outside. We drove through neighborhoods for about twenty minutes before joining the I-90/94 to O'Hare. Except for one small stretch, the traffic was relatively light and we made it to the airport in good time. Checking in was a breeze and I had more than an hour and a half before the flight. Unfortunately, once I went past security there was no restaurant to get coffee, nor a bookstore to purchase a paper and magazines. The kiosks were not open and I didn't fancy going out and passing through security again. So I just sat and watched the other passengers. Many seemed like they were Mexicans returning from or going for visits. There was the usual motley crew of white Americans who looked like tourists by their feigned eager innocence and excitement. And there were teenagers, perhaps on a school trip. After a while, I pulled out Barack Obama's memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, and started reading from where I had left off about a year ago. He is in Indonesia with his mother and step-father. Now that he has won the Democratic Party nomination, I am more anxious than ever to understand him, his background, and to understand any possible influences that might show up in his policies and world view should he become president. I plan to write a commentary on the meaning and implications of his candidacy for Africa. After the memoir, I will read his most recent book, *The Audacity of Hope*, and then David Mendell's *Obama: from Promise to Power*. Surely, these three books should give me some insight into this remarkable historical figure.

I sat next to a white couple on the plane. The woman was reading a novel and the man seemed to be honing his Spanish. Thankfully, they didn't try to talk to me after the initial smiles. Except for the time I dozed off, I buried myself in Obama's memoirs, which I found increasingly captivating. In the book, he has now returned to Hawaii to live with his grandparents. He is such a vivid, incisive writer, honest and humorous, too. The flight was quite pleasant; almost four hours later we landed in Mexico City. Sitting in the aisle seat, I only caught brief glimpses of this vast city. "It's big," said the man sitting on the window seat, sounding rather surprised. "Yes," his wife agreed, leaning over.

The airport seemed large as well, buzzing on this Sunday morning with countless passengers. There were shops and restaurants everywhere. It was remarkably clean and vibrant—the music, the bright murals. I cleared immigration and went to wait for my connecting flight, which was slightly delayed. In the meantime, I went into a restaurant

and ordered a club sandwich. I was in Mexico, a sea of mostly brown people all around me, some whites, both from abroad and from Mexico—at least they sounded like it from the way they spoke—and only a handful of blacks. Book and magazine stores were open but I couldn't buy anything, given my lack of Spanish. I saw one magazine with Obama on the cover. Unable to purchase the newspapers or strike a conversation with anyone, I took refuge in Obama's memoir. The memoir kept me company on the half-full flight from Mexico City to Veracruz that lasted 35 minutes. The Veracruz airport was small and elegant. Other than the black woman who had come on the flight, there were no black people to be seen.

The taxi driver seemed keen for a conversation. I had to strain my ears to understand what he was saying. He spoke some English, while I spoke no Spanish. Perhaps noticing my discomfort or tiredness he decided to leave me alone after giving me a directory of restaurants, which I flipped through fitfully. The drive from the airport to the hotel lasted more than twenty minutes. We passed through some residential areas, through the beach with its bamboo restaurants and stone walkways that mirrored the Copacabana in Rio, and the harbor with hulls of ships and containers headed to the old part of town. The hotel, Gran Hotel Diligencias, was in front of the old city square, which was packed with people, some taking the afternoon off perhaps after church, some enjoying their meals on the verandas of the surrounding hotels and restaurants, some loitering in the pleasant sun, some listening to a speaker on one side of the square, and some walking or sitting by themselves, their loneliness masked by the crowd.

I was checked in by three lovely young ladies who seemed keen to practice their English and compete over their respective competencies. I was immensely relieved to learn that wireless Internet was available in the room; I was given a card to connect to the Internet in case the wireless connection did not work out. "Some rooms have bad connections," one of the three young women explained.

After unpacking and checking out the facilities in the room, which were more than satisfactory, I got on the Internet and sent messages to Cassandra and Natasha. Cassandra e-mailed me right back. She is so excited about her trip to Chile and Argentina. I am so happy for her! I could not bear a repeat of last summer when I was the only one traveling out of the country and she was cooped up in the small apartment in Chicago. We are both professional academics and she needs to pursue her dreams, which include research travels, as much as I am able to pursue mine. She did the right thing to apply for this travel project to South America. We will have stories to exchange.

Ben Vinson called me in the hotel. He arrived in Mexico City a little after 2:00 p.m. and he will be coming to Veracruz on Tuesday for the opening of the conference on African Diasporas in Mexico and Central America. Without Ben, I would not have known about this conference and come to Veracruz at this time. I hope I will be able to make good contacts of local, national, and regional scholars who work on the subject who I can talk to and can assist with my project. The first thing is to get a research assistant.

I walked around the neighborhood for over half an hour. The streets were mostly empty except for the city square. When I returned, I decided to order room service. Linguistic incompetence can be costly. I thought I had ordered a full meal. It turned out to be an appetizer of shrimp. An hour later, I went to the hotel restaurant for a proper dinner, a delicious plate of stuffed fish and shrimp.

June 9, 2008

This was my first full day in Veracruz, Mexico. I woke up rather late; trying to recover from the last few days, including my Saturday night of truncated sleep.

After taking a nice, long shower, I decided to attend to some office matters and arrangements for my trip to Cuba, Britain, and France. Then I went to the veranda to take a late breakfast. The square was already full of people milling, sitting, talking, having their shoes polished, and generally taking it easy. Next to my table sat a woman quietly puffing away on her cigarette and reading a book. It all looked so tranquil, uplifting in a strange sort of way.

I ended up sitting there for over three hours going through Barbara Ransby's captivating and brilliant draft of the biography of Eslanda ("Essie") Goode Robeson, wife of the legendary artist-activist, Paul Robeson. Barbara has submitted it for consideration for her promotion to full professor. She deserves the promotion; in fact, she should have gotten it by now. Her record and the quality of her scholarship are far superior to many sitting in judgment of her. It is so unfair, so unconscionable how when some of us have made it we become gatekeepers to slow down the progress of others. And what a fascinating woman Essie Robeson was; her indefatigable struggles for freedom, for herself and her people in the U.S. and Africa, from racial, colonial, gender, and sexual oppression. It is truly moving. It is going to be an important book.

For the rest of the afternoon, I couldn't resist catching up on the news and reports on the Internet. Before I knew it, I had started writing a blog, a short piece on the world and African reactions to Senator Obama's nomination, accompanied by a few relevant news reports. Then I wrote a standalone blog on Africa's changing place in the world symbolized by the recurring summits with different economic powers—China, the EU, India, and Japan. I have been thinking of writing such a piece ever since I learned of the India-Africa summit and the forthcoming Japan-Africa Summit when I was in South Africa recently. By the time I finished the blog it was after 10:00 p.m., too late, I felt, to go downstairs to the restaurant for dinner, and I couldn't be bothered ordering room service. I settled into bed and resumed reading Obama's memoirs. He is now in Kenya, perhaps the most fascinating part of the book for me.

June 10, 2008

Finally, I can begin to focus on what I came here for. The International Congress of Diaspora Nations and Difference for African Descendent People in Mexico and Central America opened in the late afternoon.

Before going to the conference in the hotel next door, Hotel Veracruz—which was fully booked when I tried to reserve a room last week—I spent the day reading Obama's memoirs (he is now in his father's ancestral home in Nyanza, which reads like a bad anthropological tract); online newspapers (the usual stuff—the increasingly ugly state of U.S. elections, the Zimbabwe crisis, the rising prices of gas, opinion pieces by ignorant pundits, etc.); and stuff on Mexico in general and Afro-Mexico in particular. I had woken up incredibly hungry so I went for a hearty breakfast before taking a shower: how filling it was—steak, egg, tortillas, and coffee, and something that tasted and looked like bean paste covered with white cheese. I must have eaten fast for I soon had a stomachache.

The conference was scheduled to open at 5:00 p.m. I was at the hotel half an hour before that and called Ben's room. He wasn't in, but I soon bumped into him in the hotel lobby. Casually dressed in jeans and polo shirt, he smiled broadly and extended his arms for a bear hug. We were both excited to see each other. He is such a warm and decent person; you cannot fail to like him. I asked him about the family, Yolanda, and his two-month-old baby, Alison. He grinned from ear to ear, the face of a contented, happy man. The wonder, infinite in the generosity of fatherhood!

I also bumped into Paul Lovejoy with his Costa Rican wife; he says he now lives in Costa Rica and commutes to York University in Toronto for his job. Ever smiling with a touch of slyness, he hasn't changed much since I last saw him at one of the ASA meetings perhaps two or so years ago. In the hall for the opening ceremony, I saw Verene Shepherd, my old colleague from the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica looking all regal in an exquisite Ghanaian outfit and a wrap of similar color rolled round her slightly purplish tinted locks. We hugged. I had last seen her in 1995 when I took students from Trent to Jamaica. She introduced me to her husband who I remembered last seeing in 1984. A businessman, he quickly started to complain about the failure of African countries, that they did not provide worthwhile economic models of success to follow. I politely indulged him by avoiding commentary beyond meaningless grunts. Thankfully, the open ceremonies were about to begin.

The hall was packed to capacity so that many people were left standing. In front, rows of camera men jostled for angles facing the dais. Soon, the official entourage entered, the governor of the state of Veracruz and his lieutenants in dark-blue suits. The governor himself was wearing a grey suit. The public speeches took what seemed like an interminably long time, partly because I did not understand what was being said. I later learned head-phones with translation were available at the back of the room. The person seated next to me, a French-Italian researcher on the African diaspora who had just published a book on Caribbean immigration to Africa—she told me all this in a blinding minute with surprising familiarity—said the conference organizers and the politicians, including the governor, mostly talked about the importance of Africans in the making of the Americas. One said they were one of the three pillars, the other two being Europeans and the indigenous people. It was pointed out that Afro-Mexicans were an important part of the country's history and heritage. Then they left; they even took the podium with them! Verene's husband scrambled to get another podium from the hotel. She was scheduled to give the first plenary, a brilliant presentation, entitled "Belonging and Unbelonging: Difference, Ethnicity, and Ranking in Colonial Jamaica," which offered a masterly overview of the construction of national, race, ethnic, and class identities in Jamaica. Historical details were finely balanced with analytical and theoretical insights. She was impressive.

After the plenary, Ben and I and two students, Danielle, a PhD student from Duke, and Trey, an undergraduate senior from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, went for dinner on the veranda of one of the hotels facing the plaza. I was not too hungry, for I had stuffed myself with snacks at the reception following the opening ceremony and plenary lecture. I went more for the company. Ben left the reception, for what turned out to be almost an hour, to talk to Yolanda. He is so devoted, it's endearing to watch. The reception was held on the terrace of the first floor of the hotel. It was a beautiful evening, cool weather, plenty of wine for the drinkers, and full of overly open conviviality, which boring academics tend to display at international conferences.

It turned out Danielle applied for a PhD program at Penn State and had decided to go to Duke instead. Both Ben and I commended her for her wise decision. I remembered meeting with her at Penn State and trying to convince her to give it a chance. We now laughed it off. She did not intend to be the History department's experimental black PhD student, she said. Her father is African American and her mother is Mexican. She is doing research on Afro-Mexicans in the region. Ben suggested she would make an ideal research assistant after the conference. I offered to talk to her tomorrow morning. The open-air restaurant was too loud to discuss serious matters. Music was booming from a specially constructed stage on the plaza. Pulsating, loud, rhythmic sounds of merengue, or what sounded like that. It was specially staged for the conference participants. The plaza was packed. Drinks flowed. Dancers frolicked. The rest of us watched, screaming at each other to be heard, loosened with excitement. It was a fitting end to the opening day of the conference. Only in Mexico, in the global South!

I found a load of messages, e-mails, and voicemail on my Blackberry. The best was from Natasha. She has interviews in Champaign. Maybe, just maybe, she will get a job. I am keeping my fingers tightly crossed.

June 11, 2008

This was a long, intellectually rich day. I attended sessions from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., save for a lunch break. As is common at conferences, the quality of the presentations was uneven—some were brilliant, many more were quite pedestrian, as far as I could follow from the translation.

The plenary session by Peter Wade on "The Presence of the Negro in Mestizaje," seemed provocative, although Ben said later it repeated much of his recent scholarship. He examined the contradictory positions of blacks in Latin America in the constructions of modernity and nationhood: on the one hand they embodied savagery, and on the other they were imitated by whites. In addition, the position of mixed-race children occupied an ambivalent space in an emerging sense of Latin Americanness, simultaneously its incarnation and its threat to a Latin Americanness perched on whiteness.

There were three concurrent sessions which made it rather difficult to choose, for all the topics looked interesting. The first session I went to was "Commerce, Migration, and the Diaspora during the Colonial Epoch." The papers were as widely ranging as they were interesting and informative. Jane Landers from Vanderbilt University discussed "Diasporan Mobility and Links Among the Black Populations of Cuba, Florida, and New Spain," and showed how important and extensive these links were during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries; John Thornton and Linda Heyward—a rather interesting couple—talked about "Africans in Iberian America: The Angolan Waves," which basically summarized the dominance of Angolan migration during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the social capital, resources, attitudes, and practices they brought, including traditions of monarchies, Creole Catholicism, naming practices, literacy, clothing, and diplomatic skills. Many had already been exposed to Portuguese culture by the time of their capture and transshipment to Iberian America. David Wheat, also from Vanderbilt, discussed the role of Angola-based slave merchant Garcia Mendes de Castello Branco in early seventeenth-century Veracruz and Spanish Jamaica—an easily forgettable presentation. Pilar Zabala from the University of Yucatan, in another boring presentation

beloved by pedantic historians, presented "Illegal Forms of African Slaves in New Spain: Licenses and Osientos," which almost sent me to sleep. I was awoken by Patrick Carroll from the University of Texas who presented a theoretically intriguing inquisition, "Afro-Mexicans and the Debate on the Social Significance of Race and Class at the end of the Colonial Era in Mexico," in which he argued there existed three parallel rather than hierarchical, distinctive social systems through which identities were constructed, a framework that seemed to ignore the overarching structuring of white supremacy.

The second session opened with "The African Diaspora, between Theory, Rhetoric and Practice: Lessons from the African and Maya History Project in Belize," by Joseph-Ernest Aondofe from Nigeria, who later told me he has lived in Belize for thirteen years. It was essentially a summary of the project for which he served as one of the leaders, with predictable conclusions about the necessity and challenges of curricula reform. Then the brilliant paper, "Re-Making Latin America: Theorizing Contemporary Global Flows, State Formation and Racial Projects" by Jennifer Anne Jones and Tiana S. Paschel from Berkeley. The latter didn't come. Jones presented it with compelling intellectual elegance and showed how racial inclusion and exclusion have been central to nation-building in Latin America, and how discourses of race and consciousness of the racial state have remained intact despite shifts in racial regimes from color blindness to multiculturalism. They underscored the symbolic and material exclusion of Afro-Mexicans from the Mexican state, a situation that is increasingly under pressure from Afro-Mexican migrations to the U.S. facilitated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and neo-liberalism, which is reconfiguring Afro-Mexican visibility and leading to increased scholarship on them. From such a high, we were brought down to earth by a solid, if dry, presentation, "Contours of Post-Emancipation Migrations: The Jamaican Presence in Central America 1860–1920" by Candace Wynter from Columbia College in Chicago, which ably traced the recruitment, treatment, and deportation of Jamaicans, especially to Panama and other parts of Central America.

The morning sessions ended at 2:00 pm, and although some dragged on after that Ben, Wade, and I, and one other person whose name I can't remember, went to lunch. It took forever for our meals to come. I had scheduled an interview with Professor Sagrario Cruz-Carretero from the University of Veracruz at 3:00. Ben tells me she is one of the leading Mexican scholars on Afro-Mexican history and culture. I went to meet her in the lobby. Somewhat to my relief she didn't turn up, so a quarter of an hour later I returned to join Ben, Wade, and the other person. My order—a club sandwich—had apparently just come; Wade was still waiting for his. By the time we finished lunch, it was almost time for the long, three-hour, afternoon session.

I went to the session on transatlantic circulations. Hardly had the first presentation finished when I started feeling drowsy. I had gone to bed late and woke up quite early—after perhaps only six hours of sleep. Omer Buatu Batubenge from the University of Colima presented, "The Role of the Identity of People of African Descent in the Process of National Integration in Mexico," in which he discussed Congolese immigrants and the challenges of internal and external integration among themselves, other black people, and in the wider society. I hardly followed the next four presentations. In fact, at one point I left to go back to the hotel and try to take a nap. I found a text message from Natasha. She sounded so cheerful: it must be the excitement of going to Champaign and for her interview. I was happy for her. That buoyed me up and I forgot about the nap and returned to the session. But I had already mentally switched off and didn't take any notes. Thankfully, at 7:00 p.m., the session ended and we all headed to the veranda where

we had the reception last evening. I talked to several people whose papers I had enjoyed, including Jones, who I discovered is from Chicago and grew up in Rogers Park, where she still has family. I asked her for a copy of her paper and told her I would pass it on to my colleagues—Lynette, Ainsworth, and Cassandra—who are editing a book on migrations and the new diaspora in the U.S., for consideration.

Hardly had we settled into relief that the day's formal program was over when we were herded back into the main hall at 7:00 p.m. for a book launch. It was an elaborate affair. The editors and some of the writers—six or seven of them—each laboriously sang praises for the book for ten minutes or more. Ben tried to translate and eventually gave up from tiredness and boredom. We all clapped handily and happily when the launch was declared over. Earlier in the day, I bought a copy, together with other books that Danielle recommended. One more reason I need to learn Spanish, I told myself.

Before going to dinner, Ben suggested that we go to his room so he could make a call to Yolanda. He fixed his computer with a camera and earphone for both of us to talk to her. I thought that was cool and told him I would get my laptop similarly equipped so that I could make long-distance calls at such ridiculously low rates—4 cents a minute. Last month I spent \$315 on my Blackberry from making calls on the trip to South Africa and Malawi. Unfortunately, the Internet didn't seem to be working so we were unable to make the call. He was visibly disappointed and betrayed a little concern that he would be unable to call his beloved wife and daughter. Before we left, he took calling cards to call from a public phone at the restaurant.

We were joined by an acquaintance of Ben, a young woman from the University of Texas, Juliet Hooker, who had chaired the book launch. Tall and slim, she is an assistant professor at UT Austin. I asked her about Toyin Falola and Jemina Peirre, both of whom she knows. She is Afro-Nicaraguan. We found a restaurant at what looked like a strip mall. The place was packed and brightly lit. Both the food and conversation were delicious. Hooker gave me a preview of her talk tomorrow when I asked her about her new research following the completion of her first book, which is due out in the fall. Ben had gone to call Yolanda. I was immediately impressed by Hooker's sharp intellect and analytical breadth. I had planned to sleep in until the first session tomorrow at 10:30 a.m., but I promised I would attend her plenary lecture at 9:00 a.m. We walked in the humid evening air back to our respective hotels, satisfied with the ample food in our bellies and with the intellectual stimulation our minds had enjoyed today.

June 12, 2008

Juliet Hooker was brilliant. Her talk, "The Struggle for Rights among Afro-descendants: Between Race and Culture," sought to provide a comprehensive model of multicultural citizenship in Latin America. She noted that there are about 150 million people of African descent, 30% of the total regional population, the largest concentration being in Brazil and Central America. It is difficult to get accurate data because some countries do not include race in their census data, while in others, different categories are maintained for blacks and mestizos. The struggles she examined are those centered around, 1) the acknowledgment of blacks as ethnic or racial groups, 2) land rights, 3) bilingual education, and 4) affirmative action. Considerable successes have been achieved but many obstacles remain, including the very language they ought to use to formulate their rights claims.

Where African descendants are considered as ethnic groups, they have gained collective rights like the indigenous people; where they are considered racial groups, they have gained separate rights; and where they are considered both ethnic and racial groups, they have gained both sets of rights. She identified four groups among Afro descendants 1) Afro-Mestizos who have weak collective racial identity, 2) Afro-Mestizos with strong racial identity mostly to be found in urban centers, 3) Maroon (runaway African slave) communities, often regarded as separate cultural communities, and 4) West Indian immigrants, many of whom came as labor immigrants.

The first morning session continued with the theme "Access to Rights." The first presentation was by Miguel Gonzalez from the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast that discussed the "Restricted Inclusion: Divergent Perspectives of Autonomy," and explored the tensions between autonomy and democracy in the construction of multicultural citizenship in Mexico. The second presentation was by Carlo Agudelo from the Center for the Study of Mexico and Central America, entitled, "Transnational Networks of Black Movement in Central America," in which he explored local, regional, and international assertion of black rights, including the impact of civil rights struggles in the U.S. and in South Africa at the Durban Conference of 2001. The third presentation was by Gabriela Iturraide from the National Autonomous University of Mexico who discussed "Access to Citizenship and Political Participation for the Afro Descendant Population," in which existing constitutional arrangements were examined in terms of their norms and implementation; suggestions were made to broaden the scope of such investigations to include allocation of public funding as it affects the Afro descendants beyond the usual focus of participation in electoral politics.

The fourth paper, by Georges Priestley, a Panamanian from New York University, was a riveting presentation, "The Black Movement in Panama, 1994–2006." The context was the disastrous consequences of the U.S. invasion of 1989 and the imposition of neo-liberalism, which gravely undermined the black movement and bolstered racism, reinforcing the age-old notion of a "rainbow nation," that denies racism exists. The black movement gradually regained its voice and forced issues of racism into the media and on the national agenda from 1999 on. Despite its successes, strengthened by the Panamanian diaspora, the movement is weakened by the fact that the various groups are focused on a single issue. Black ethnicity, however, is now accepted. There is a greater unity among the two black groups: those of colonial origin and those of Caribbean origin. In addition, two Panamanians of Caribbean descent were nominated to the Supreme Court. There is now a campaign to include a category for Afro-descendants in the 2010 census. The last time this categorization happened was in 1940.

The last presentation was by Jean-Philibert Mobwa Mobwa N'Djoli, a Congolese working with the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination. He began by talking about the meaning and importance of naming—focusing on his own name. Then he asked the audience how many Afro-Mexicans there were. One hand went up. Afro-Central Americans: four hands. Then he rambled on about the reluctance of Afro-Mexicans to call themselves as such, or simply as blacks, as in the U.S. and elsewhere; how they were marginalized and oppressed in all walks of life; that they are spread across the country; and that there is a need for affirmative action for Afro-Mexicans and more research on the subject. From the questions after the presentation it was clear that Mobwa had upset some in the audience for his aggressive advocacy for black identity among Afro-Mexicans and for his failure to discuss what was being done by the Mexican government to address

discrimination, the charge of his ministry. Perhaps not much, Ben and I speculated later at lunch. We wondered what Mobwa, a foreigner, was doing in such a position. For window dressing, we concluded.

The next session proved quite problematic. The two sessions I would have loved to attend, "Social Movements," and "Cultural Identities," did not have translation provided. In fact, my choice of sessions to attend has been dictated by the availability of translation services. At any one time, one session, and occasionally two, had translation. So I ended up going to the session "Slavery: System and Resistance." Paul Lovejoy's presentation, "British Imperial Ambitions on the Mosquito Shore in the Eighteenth Century and the Abolition of 'Indian Slavery,'" was enough to get me scurrying out of the room. I briefly went to my room and returned for lunch with Ben and Juliet Hooker.

Thankfully, the afternoon session turned out to be the best I had attended. All the presenters were fantastic. Quince Duncan, a large dark man from Costa Rica who works for UNESCO's Slave Trade Routes project, gave an insightful analysis of the genealogies of racial discourses and their manifestations in Central America in his talk, "Historical Overview of Racism in Central America." This was followed by an Afro-Mexican activist, Eduardo Anorve Zapata, who, in his talk "What they say About Blacks," offered us a wonderfully illustrated overview of Afro-Mexican stereotypes—mostly negative, of course—held by the wider society and internalized by the Afro-Mexicans themselves. The slides of images that accompanied his talk presented a rich overview of the many faces of Afro-Mexican society and culture and their struggles for belonging and affirmation.

Then came Galadriel Mehera Gerardo, a skinny white woman from the University of Youngstown, who gave an informative presentation, "Writing Africans out of Mexican Racial Hierarchy: Anti-African Sentiments, U.S. Influence, and Mexican Scientific Racism in the First Half of the 20th Century," in which she traced the rise of social Darwinist thought and responses by three prominent Mexican intellectuals. While contesting the denigration of Mexico in the racist schemas of the day, which were propagated in western Europe and the U.S., as a nation populated by lesser Europeans—the Spanish—and a large and inferior indigenous population, the three Mexican intellectuals sought to reaffirm the uniqueness and modernity of Mexican national identity by emphasizing racial mixing as progressive. But the ideology of *mestizaje* they developed reified American and European racial ideology in so far as it completely wrote out the African presence from Mexican history, society, and identity. Whiteness retained its privileged status in the racial hierarchy, and blackness was extinguished from the national imaginary.

This theme was picked up and expanded by Monica Moreno Figueroa, an Afro-Mexican woman teaching at the University of Newcastle, in her presentation, "Mestizaje, Everyday Practices and Contemporary Racism in Mexico." She argued that mestizaje was a political ideology, a space of privilege and racialization that simultaneously re-inscribed whiteness and marginalized blackness. Mestizaje, despite its claims of racelessness and deracialization, normalized racism against blacks who continued to be stereotyped and marginalized. She enumerated the various manifestations of the practices of racialization and racism. Apparently, I was not the only one who found this session on "Racism and Anti-Racism" so invigorating. The question-and-answer period that followed was vigorous and animated. People remained even after the session formally ended as they continued to discuss and debate.

For the rest of the evening I spent time with Ben. We had dinner in the restaurant at his hotel where the conference is being held and lingered there discussing all manner of professional and personal issues, ranging from our visions for our respective programs

and career trajectories, to our families. I confided in him that I was now ready to pursue a possible option at an Ivy League school and quit the headship following the Dean's decision to cap the size of our department and suspend the hiring promises that had been made to me. I now saw no prospects of pursuing an intellectual agenda for the department, especially in diaspora studies, since there would be no new hires. It also became abundantly clear that public universities cannot compete effectively with private ones, and I cannot be spending my time managing salary compression issues and maintaining the bureaucratic grind of departmental administration without the exciting compensation of intellectual growth and rebranding.

Ben wants to succeed as Director, to build a vibrant Africana Studies program at Johns Hopkins, and I have no doubt he will. He is concerned about the lack of faculty lines, the constant negotiations with unsympathetic departments. He has had to postpone taking time off until the new program is on firmer footing. He is also concerned with the challenges of managing his administrative chores, parenthood as the father of a new born baby, and his research and writing. He has been biding his time by editing two books, but he has a big book project that he is dying to finish. He wonders whether he should accept a publishing contract from Blackwell or aim for a university press. I said he had nothing to prove—Blackwell was fine, especially since they were willing to publish a Spanish version of his book. We both felt relieved and reassured from this sharing of concerns, challenges, visions, and ambitions. Occasionally we were interrupted by people from the conference going to or returning from the plaza or by the music playing at the strip mall. "Are we going dancing?" Monica Figueroa asked us at one time. We just smiled. We must have looked like two anti-social nerds. But it was so much fun!

June 13, 2008

Today was the last day of the conference. I look forward to a more leisurely pace, certainly not waking up so early every day as I have been doing for the past few days. Besides attending the formal sessions, I conducted interviews with several conference participants.

I had agreed to interview Father Glynn Jemmott at 9:00 a.m. To my disappointment, he asked me to postpone our meeting until after the plenary session. Ibrahima Thioub, originally a scholar from the University of Cheikh Anta Diop, was scheduled to speak, but he didn't make it to Mexico. Posters placed in elevators and on doors to the meeting rooms announced that Paul Lovejoy would speak instead on the latest research on slavery and the slave trade in West Africa. I did not intend to listen to his usual babble about slavery in West Africa being larger than in the Americas. So I opted for breakfast where I was joined by two women, one from Canada and the other from France. The Canadian, who was born in Honduras and went to Canada at age two, talked passionately about her experience growing up black and working in Montreal and the pervasive racism. She had also lived and worked in Brazil. The French woman, a student in Paris, largely smiled and offered polite comments on unrelated issues.

By the time we got back to the plenary halls, the session was ending. I saw Ben standing near the door and heard a woman, an Afro-Peruvian studying at California State University, Los Angeles, as she clearly told everyone she met, asking Paul Lovejoy about his sources. I didn't hear or care for the response, for I was engaged in a whispering conversation with Ben. When Father Glynn saw me, he walked towards us.

Father Glynn is a Catholic priest who has worked as a missionary—his own words—among the Afro-Mexican communities in Costa Chica in Southern Mexico where he has worked for the past twenty-five years. A tall, slender man with graying hair, with an intense, handsome face that breaks into an easy smile, he speaks with calm passion about the plight of Afro-Mexicans. He finds among them, he said towards the end of our conversation, an unfathomable desire and need for self-affirmation that will take decades, centuries even, to satisfy. They have been so deeply wounded by racism and marginality that astonished him, coming from Trinidad. He insisted that migrants like him couldn't speak for Afro-Mexicans, that we are several voices removed from their experiences and dreams. However, he has tried to work with them. We all have to get out of our comfort zones and confront the realities, recording the few successes and the many enduring challenges. He didn't feel hopeless about things. This very conference was a reflection of the recognition Afro-Mexicans are now receiving, although we both agreed it was unfortunate the representation of Afro-Mexicans was limited. While advances were being made in terms of academic research, politically, not much has happened to redress the marginality of Afro-Mexicans. There is need to cultivate leadership among them and form empowering networks with them, to promote leadership of action and leadership of thought, in short, for a more effective praxis.

When I asked him what he has been doing, he described the three dimensions of his social ministry in Costa Chica. Ben had told me the importance of his work, as a crucial figure in the growth of Afro-Mexican consciousness and movement in the region. The first were efforts to generate leadership, within the community, that is capable of organizing the community. Beyond meetings, little has been advanced in this area—an indication of the deep-seated marginality of the community and an incapacity to see possibilities of change. One way of fostering leadership and agency would be the creation of a folk research center—and here he candidly asked for any assistance people like me could provide—where local people can begin to map out their own history and experiences, tap into their own resources, and begin to develop their leadership capacities. Second has been his work in art and artistic expression and production. They created a cultural center whose first graduates finished their training recently. The graduates are in the process of producing a catalogue of their work and in September, three will begin a project involving visits to various villages to train young artists. They will be hosted by the community but will need \$250 per month for six months. This will be followed by an evaluation that will determine future courses of action. There are also plans to organize a traveling exhibit of Afro-Mexican art, both to make this art more visible and to generate financial and material support as well as for further training for the artists. The third dimension, which has not been as successful as the second, focuses on economic development, which has to underpin any sustainable program of cultural and artistic development. Efforts are underway to establish viable economic enterprises. A colleague of his is undertaking a project to assess and evaluate the assets of some of the communities he works with.

One of the most fruitful areas of our discussion centered on the impact of Afro-Mexican migrations on the migrant communities themselves and those they left behind in Mexico. He noted that Afro-Mexicans have migrated and established communities in various U.S. locations from Joliet, near Chicago, to Pasadena, near Los Angeles, to Milwaukee, Atlanta, Denver, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and throughout New Jersey. The migrants and their children not only face the usual challenges of integration, but, coming out of their highly marginalized backgrounds, they sometimes fall prey to the sanctions of rootlessness and high rates of drug abuse and imprisonment. Even those who don't marry are poor or live

in poor neighborhoods where they have to deal with external assaults meted out to blacks by a racialized society. They also face tense relations with African Americans. It is important, he implored, for researchers in diaspora studies to explore not only the positive aspects of diasporic encounters, but also their negative consequences; to be mindful of the different classes of migrants and new diasporas and their different spatial and social locations in their new host communities, and the conflictual, not just cooperative, relations they develop with local black communities. Specifically, we have to deal with the communities where Afro-Mexican immigrants are settled, as well as their daily interactions with the African Americans they encounter. Above all, we have to unpack the Hispanic category that is used in the U.S. to make blacks invisible, as it reinforces the marginalization and invisibility they already suffer in Mexico and elsewhere in the region with the insidious ideologies of *mestizaje*.

I asked Father Jemmott how he was perceived in the Afro-Mexican communities he worked in. He thought that being black was important, so was being a Catholic priest in a country where Catholicism is such an important force. He uses his identity as a black person as a starting point, but is careful not to sentimentalize it, for his relations with Afro-Mexicans cannot be sustained by racial affinity alone, unsupported by broad and difficult social agendas. Altogether, he noted that there are at least 200 Afro-Mexican communities along the coast, including Costa Chica, but it is hard to know the size of the Afro-Mexican population because there is no specific category for them in the census.

Our discussion left me with even more questions, which time did not allow us to explore. What impact did the Afro-Mexican migrants and the diaspora have on their communities in particular, and Mexico, in general? I also wish we had explored more of the role of African diasporas on other diasporas, the challenges of imposing paradigms developed in different contexts, of measuring in this case Afro-Mexican identities and struggles in terms of the Caribbean rather than in terms of the Mexican historical experience. I was able, fortunately, to explore the source of these issues in my discussions with Mobwa at lunch.

I found the first session on, "Multiplicity of the Negro/Black" already in session. The first speaker, Joseph Palacio from the University of the West Indies, was coming to the end of his presentation, "Legalization of Lot Tenure in Barranco 1892-1916: Case Study of first formal interactions on rights to lots between the British and the Garifuna in Southern Belize." I found him speaking about the manipulation and transfer of lot rights between the British, Garifuna, and Creoles, a subject he claimed has been ignored. He was followed by Gloria Lara from the Center of the Advanced Investigation and Study of Social Anthropology, who presented "Appearance in the Construction of Ethnic-Political Referents in Social Differentiation in Costa Chica of Oaxaca: Some Discussion Issues." She discussed the complexities of the Afro-Mexican population in Costa Chica, group identification and social categorization, popular stereotypes about them and their classifications by academics, the diversities among them in appearance, and the implications of the integration of the region into the country. They are now recognized as a community according to the 1988 law of communities, but the law does not identify who is Afro-Mexican.

Elizabeth Cumin from the Research Institute for Development followed with "The Creole of Belize: Ethnic Groups or Incarnation of National Identity?" in which she discussed the relationship between ethnic and national identities, compared the construction of identities in Central America and Mexico, and the complexities and contradictions in the construction of ethnic and national identities in Belize. Whereas before, Creole represented attempts to construct a national identity, now, not only are there different constructions

of Creole, but new concerns have emerged for the recognition of multiple ethnic communities and histories, including African and Mayan. She gave several references as she proceeded with her presentation. Finally, there was the fascinating presentation by Angelica Ramirez from the University of Veracruz, "Recovery of Historical Memory in a Community of Afro-Mestizo Origin." She discussed results from a research project involving school children who were asked to interview their parents and grandparents about their family histories. The interviewees were anxious to deny their African origins, although they were aware of them, and seemed intent on stressing their Spanish origins. The inferiority complexes were particularly pronounced among the oldest who tended to be darkest in complexion.

During the question-and-answer period, the audience asked quite penetrating questions. On Costa Chica, the point was made that many categories used to identify the people—mestizo, moreno, black—are academic categories and not the people's own terms of self-classification. It was pointed out that we need to be careful in our use of the term "Creole," which has different meanings in the English, French, and Spanish traditions and national contexts. A self-identified black professor who looked almost white reminded the audience that notions and identities of blackness were always changing depending on time, context, and place.

Before I went to the second session, I had an interview with Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita who had been highly recommended by Ben as a leading historian of slavery in Mexico. She discussed the importance of the plantation economy in early colonial Mexico, in which African slave labor was crucial to the development of the Mexican economy, which needs to be duly recognized. Africans were also involved in the founding of towns and settling in several regions. Córdoba was founded by Maroons in the seventeenth century, specifically in 1618, and Yanga was declared a town of free Negroes in 1641. The sugar economy developed until the eighteenth century when it was rocked by the Maroon revolt of 1735 and ensuing guerrilla warfare, which led to the freedom of many slaves. Nevertheless, by the end of the eighteenth century, more blacks were slaves than free people. Mexican independence in 1810 was quickly followed by the abolition of slavery. Despite the importance of the plantation slave economy, the number of Africans was contained, unlike in Cuba and parts of Spanish America, by the remarkable recovery of the indigenous population following its initial decline. Chávez-Hita estimated that there might have been no more than 3,000–5,000 African slaves at any one time.

The African descended people were initially called Negroes rather than morenos. She argued that many Afro-descendants feel they are Mexican and shun a separate identity. She blamed scholars for creating identities for them. She also believes that people from these communities tend to adopt and return with the identity of Afro-Mexicans in the U.S. She claimed, rather unconvincingly, that she too only discovered she was of Spanish descent when she lived in the U.S.! A small, friendly woman with brownish hair, she seemed troubled by the turn scholarship on Afro-Mexicans seemed to be taking. Scholarly interest in Afro-Mexicans started with the publication of a book on the African presence in Mexico in 1966, she said. She claimed that while their economic roles as workers was unquestionable, their cultural influences were less clear, a subject she believed anthropologists who study cultural survivals are best equipped to handle. Their political influence is negligible. The emerging Afro-Mexican political movement owes more to the Black Power movement in the U.S. than to domestic inspiration. She believes that the impact of identity-based movements has been very limited, giving the example of the

Indian movements, which are quite strong but have not achieved much economically. She gave me her address and phone number to call her if I had further questions.

The second session had just started when I went in. It was the second part on the same theme of the first session. There were only three presenters. Matthew Francis Rarey from the University of Wisconsin presented "Afro-Mexican Identity and Institutional Representation." He discussed the malleability of Afro-Mexican identities, that they are not frozen in national history but reproduced through migration, in particular along the porous U.S.-Mexico border. He used this analytical framework to examine the representation of Afro-Mexican identity through museum exhibitions, how the governing of museums reproduces the racial divide and discourses. Nicolas Rey from the University of Guadalajara presented "From Caribbeans to Panamanians: The 'Long Journey' of Guadeloupians, Martinicans, and their Descendants in the Isthmus." He prefaced his remarks by noting that his grandfather migrated from Guadeloupe. He underscored the challenges migrants from the Antilles faced in integrating in Panamanian society, not least the fact that unlike other migrants from the Caribbean, they had to learn English. This reinforced the divisions among the black groups, between the colonial population and the immigrant population, and among the immigrants. He emphasized that it's important to recover the history of the Antillean immigrants, who are actors in their own story, many of whom are dying. Finally, there was Gabriel Izard Martinez who presented "Garifuna and Seminole Blacks: Afro-Indigenous Mestizaje in Central and North America." He began by noting the varied names by which Afro descendants are known and traced the formation of the Garifuna and Seminoles from mixtures of Africans and indigenous people beginning with Florida in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and their subsequent migrations. He argued that the relationship between Africans and indigenous people have tended to be romanticized. The Garifuna, it was pointed out in the Q & A session, tend to emphasize that they were not slaves and seek to promote themselves as an indigenous ethnic community.

Mobwa turned out to have a fascinating biography. His wife, of two years, as I later learned, joined us for lunch. A very light-skinned mestizo, she insisted on saying she was mestizo, with blond hair and light blue eyes and slightly chubby cheeks, she largely kept quiet save for some occasional nods of agreement with what her husband was saying. From the Congo, Mobwa had first gone to Belgium, and from there to the U.S. where he lived in Washington, D.C. He also did some studies there. He came to Mexico sixteen years ago where he earned another Master's in Human Rights and Theology. When he first arrived, he was incredulous that there were people of African descent in the country. He only became convinced when he visited Acapulco and saw so many blacks. His next shock was that such people did not think of themselves as black. The only self-identified people of African descent he encountered were recent immigrants from the Congo and other African countries. Afro-descendants thought of themselves as mestizos. But this category emphasized Spanish-Indian mixture, excluding Africans.

Mobwa repeated what he had said in his presentation, the need for the three communities of African descent—the Afro-mestizo, Afro-Spanish, and continental Africans—to identify themselves as Afro-Mexican and become collectively more visible. For each country, they need to have an Afro-nation (Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, etc.), and for the hemisphere, they are collectively Afro-descendants. In order for Afro-Mexicans to identify themselves as such, the role of educational institutions, including universities, is crucial. The universities have not done a good job in this, he maintained. Many local academics are connected to U.S. institutions and seem keen to promote the Afro-Mestizo.

identity. Their opposition to him, as evidenced even during his presentation, is based on his efforts to popularize the Afro-Mexican identity. He recounted the story of how his own two kids have served as a powerful motivation. One day his daughter came back from school quite distraught. When he asked her what the matter was, she said she had been called black and she didn't like that, because blacks are ugly, stupid, and unhappy. He assured her there was nothing wrong with being called black. Did he seem stupid or unhappy to her? No, she said. But he was black, proud to be black. Many kids are going through that, he said sorrowfully.

I asked Mobwa about the black movement that Zapata had talked about yesterday. He wasn't sure whether he would call Zapata's group a movement as such. Zapata had once followed a movement initiated by Father Glynn and split largely on religious grounds, he thought. I had planned to pursue the matter with Zapata, with whom I had arranged an interview at 3:00 p.m. On the role of the state in Afro-Mexican matters, Mobwa indicated that the state had moved from doing nothing to expressing limited interest. The onus to increase pressure and the visibility of their issues was on the community and their supporters in the universities and elsewhere. He was saddened that Afro-Mexicans had not brought a single case before the Human Rights Council's Anti-Discrimination Unit since it started its operations in 2004. There were a lot of complaints, however, from indigenous people, women and on behalf of children. The indigenous people also have their own National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People. On relations between Afro-Mexicans and African immigrants, he noted that there were few formal connections between the two groups. And among the Africans themselves, there were divisions along nationalist groups; an association catering to all African groups had collapsed from lack of resources and interest. He concluded by stressing the positive consciousness-raising effect that the migrations to the U.S., and the work of foreign scholars like Ben Vinson and new black immigrants like him, had on Afro-Mexicans. He indicated that he is writing a book that will be published by his Council. He promised to keep in touch. I promised to "avenge" for the lunch, which he and his wife paid for, when they visit Chicago. They gave me smiles of satisfaction.

The interview with Zapata never took place because Danielle could not make it. She had passed me a note while in the last session before lunch that she had forgotten she had another engagement.

I went to the afternoon session, "Gender and Identity," the last for the day and the conference with great anticipation. I was gravely disappointed. It started well enough with a presentation by Teodora Hurtado Saa of the Autonomous University of Mexico entitled "Gender, Ethnic/Racial Conditions, Migration and Labor Movements: An Analytical Proposal on the Social Construction of Occupation Among Indigenous Women in Colombia and Mexico," in which she discussed the ways that ethnicity and race, the labor market, and migration contribute to the construction of gender identities. She noted that the leading labor-exporting countries in Latin America have large Afro-descended and indigenous populations. The position of women and their prospects among the migrant populations is important to investigate and varies from the experience of men. There is persistent subordination of women, including their sexualization as prostitutes. A powerful speaker and an unmistakably black woman from Colombia, she finished her presentation with a poster that poignantly captured the relationship between men and women; the developed and developing countries. It showed a suited white man holding a pouch of dollars in one hand and in the other pulling a chain around the neck of naked black woman crouching like a dog. She was given a rousing round of applause.

I could hardly follow the next two presentations, the first was "Gender Identity in the Brotherhood of San Benito Palermo of San Miguel el Grande" and the second, "Superstition, Evil, Love, and Punishment in the 18th Century: The Case of Maia Mulatto 'Tint Ores' in Mexico City." They were detailed, tedious, and boring, perfect examples of pedantic history. I stopped taking notes. Three more presenters remained. Ben and I decided to leave for the outdoor restaurant facing the plaza we had sat at the other night. Our conversation, centering largely on likely future directions of African diaspora studies, sounded a lot more edifying than the presentations we had left. I speculated that the field would become more global in its spatial focus, less culturalized, and more informed by economic, gender and globalization issues in its theoretical and thematic concerns. We agreed on the importance of unveiling the black presence in the category Hispanic which has allowed white South Americans a double advantage in the U.S.: benefiting from both whiteness and affirmative action for racial minorities. We were in deep conversation when a tall Mexican man called out Ben's name. "Are you Ben Vinson?" he asked. Ben nodded. The man pulled out a small book Ben had co-authored entitled *Afroméxico* and asked for an autograph, which Ben obliged quite happily. I congratulated and teased him that I felt so privileged to be seen with such a famous scholar and that I would tell Yolanda how famous her husband was in Mexico if she didn't already know!

The conference ended with a sumptuous formal dinner in my hotel. We sat at the same table with Linda Heywood and her husband John Thornton and their daughter who delighted in being her daddy's girl and smiling eagerly at every statement he made, as well as at the Mexican man sitting next to her mother. Linda and John had no clue who I was, to Ben's surprise. At one point, they asked if I worked on Mexico. That's Africanists for you; I explained to Ben, African scholars are invisible to them. The racialization of African studies in the U.S. was replicated in the marginalization of black scholars in U.S. Latin American studies, Ben explained.

The dinner was followed by a dance. The band, all dressed in matching yellow, short-sleeved shirts and white pants, with their shiny, slick-black hair, rocked the room. We watched couples take the floor with their sultry, seductive, and beautiful moves. Before long, Sagrario Cruz came to pull Ben onto the dance floor. Then, for the next number she came for me. I felt awkward and totally out of step. I had tried to arrange interviews a couple of times with her. I wished we were having the interview instead of dancing so I could avoid being so outclassed! Following our miserable forays on the dance floor, Ben and I decided to leave for the veranda of the hotel to watch the crowds and talk. Naturally, the conversation, inspired by the dancing upstairs, centered on relationships. Why did black professionals, including some of our academic colleagues, marry across the color line? We also discussed the state of black women in the academy, the need for faithfulness in a marriage, the infinite joys of a trusting relationship. Clearly, we were both missing our wives. I thanked him for informing me about the conference and for introducing me to so many people. He thanked me for my company and for sharing so much. We agreed, overall, it had been a good conference, a memorable time.

June 14, 2008

It was lovely waking up without an alarm clock going off and disturbing my sleep. For the next two hours, I lingered in my room, intermittently watching TV and reading online

papers. At noon, I went to meet Joseph-Ernest Aondofe for lunch as we had agreed. I was curious about how he ended up in Belize. I wanted to get his sense of the role of African migrants in diaspora studies and affairs.

He has been in Belize for eleven years. He first went on a Nigerian technical assistance program to the country. Apparently, Nigeria has such a program with Caribbean and Pacific countries. At the end of the two-year contract, he decided to stay. Over the years, he has been involved in research and projects to reinsert the African presence in Belizean history. He has worked closely with both leading political parties and the black movement, often working behind the scenes, to push this agenda with the launch of the African and Mayan history project. The project has resulted in the publication of several books for use in the schools. There was initially opposition from teachers, many of whom were largely concerned with the practical challenges of having to undergo retraining. The Creole elites were also opposed because Belize is a Creole nation and emphasizing separate African histories was divisive. Ironically, many of the Creoles are black. The Garifuna insisted they were an indigenous people, Afro-Caribs. What helped was the fact that the Prime Minister, Said Musa, a man of Palestinian and indigenous Mayan descent (whose biography Aondofe is writing) saw merits in such historical deconstruction and was very supportive. So was the leader of the Belizean black movement, an alumnus of Dartmouth College. In order to ensure that all the key stakeholders bought into the project, including teachers, drafts were circulated and widely discussed. As director of the project, he clearly proved pivotal, and as an African historian, he was able to show the Afro-Belizeans that many of their customs—from foods to local technologies—were indeed African-derived.

By working steadily and systematically, an African immigrant intellectual has been able to influence curricular changes that are likely to have a major impact in the re-inscription of African diasporic identity in Belize, which has been decomposed into the myths of Creolization and race mixing. In fact, to the chagrin of North American scholars, he has now become the point person for outsiders trying to study Belizean history. This led to a long discussion of the exploitative practices of Africanists who like to identify the weakest links in African and Caribbean countries to advance their career interests. Yet the same scholars are not averse to ignoring the people who helped them in the field, often not citing their work or assistance, and blocking their research from publication in U.S. and Canadian Africanist, Caribbeanist or Latin Americanist journals. I couldn't agree with him more and I told him of my writing on the politics of publishing, and knowledge production more generally in African studies. We agreed to keep in touch and he promised to send me his publications on Belizean history.

I spent the afternoon reading about Obama. I finally finished his memoir. It is a truly gripping book, remarkably searching in its honesty and his personal odyssey to find himself, to reconcile his biracial and transnational identities. The best part of the book, certainly the most captivating for me, is his Kenyan sojourn. His reading of Kenya was unusually insightful. He is undoubtedly the first high-ranking black American politician for whom the prefix *African*—as in *African American*—has uncontestable meaning, an intimacy and immediacy of identification with Africa that is as deep as it is inspiring in its possibilities. Then I started reading the second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, which already sounds less personal and more political, driven less by a search for identity than an ideological treatise, positioning him for centrist leadership.

When the sun began setting I decided to take a walk which ended up lasting two hours. I walked along the well-paved harbor from the docking area to the seaside restaurants I

had passed on the day of my arrival from the airport. There was a touch of humidity in the sea breeze, which got cooler as I walked, although I did begin to perspire. All along the walkway there were people, young and old, men and women, couples, families, teenage boys wearing baggy pants and tattoos, and teenage girls in tight shirts and flimsy high heels. And there was music almost everywhere, from live bands playing or blaring from parked cars. Vendors and kiosks were also everywhere; restaurants, and shops selling T-shirts and tourist trinkets. Adding to the intimacy of the sounds and smells of food and the calm sea lapping gently on the dark sands were the colors of buildings and their messy shapes, from old Spanish architecture to modern boxes that are a blight on so many cities. And there was the traffic, cars of every shape and size roaring along the seaside drive. I came across a wedding party, the groomsmen dressed in black suits and green shirts and the bridesmaids in flowery green dresses taking pictures. At one point, someone stopped me, not to sell me anything, as I had feared, but to talk. Unfortunately, my lack of Spanish reduced our communication to grunts and smiles. He looked black—at least in the U.S. he would be considered black—and probably about my age. There were indeed many colors of people walking along or enjoying the sights of the sea, but many were dark. Occasionally they would make brief eye contact with me, exchange a momentary gaze of mutual recognition before they quickly turned away.

By the time I got back to the hotel my feet were hurting, but I felt exhilarated. I shaved and took a shower and went down to eat on the veranda facing the plaza. Music was playing on one corner of the veranda and on the plaza. And there were people everywhere and tourist buses with open decks. Most of the passengers looked like Mexicans. It was as if it were a street party. One rarely sees such social conviviality in the socially colder climes up North.

June 15, 2008

Today was another relatively leisurely day. I woke up well rested and began reading Obama's *Audacity of Hope*. The more I read it, the more uneasy I became. I agree with much of what he says about the poverty of American politics; its coarseness, the inability of the system to address the country's fundamental domestic and international challenges, the inexcusable inability to provide universal health care, good education, housing for the poor, the list goes on. But surely, the solution does not lie in invocations of goodwill, of decency, of bipartisanship. It's about struggle, mobilizing specific constituencies to fight for these changes, not to expect the powerful forces that benefit from the system to suddenly see the light through rhetorical appeals.

I had agreed to meet Giulia Bonacci at 11:00 a.m. I went to wait for her in the lobby. Twenty minutes later, she had not turned up. I can't stand people who do not turn up on time. I decided to go for the brunch being served in the restaurant. I was about to start serving myself when she turned up all smiles and apologizing for being late. She had already eaten, but she didn't mind if I had my breakfast. We talked for the next three hours, part of which time we moved outside to the veranda.

She told me about her research on the history of Rastafarians who returned to Ethiopia and gave me the book she has written in French on the subject as a present, duly autographed. I can't wait to plod through the book since my French is extremely challenged for proper reading. A self-proclaimed "white Rasta," she is quite passionate about the subject, and hers is probably the most exhaustive study on the subject. She placed her

work in the context of works on Rastafarians, some of which she discussed (e.g., Horace Campbell's *Rastafarians and Resistance*), and on Pan-Africanism, especially the Back-to-Africa movement. She noted that, in fact, the number of Caribbeans settling in Ethiopia, specifically in Shashamane, has increased, facilitated by ease of travel. Ironically, many of the new settlers, including some from the French Antilles—Martinique and Guadeloupe—live on pensions from the French state. We explored the complex connections between globalization, cosmopolitanism, Pan-Africanism and travel for a future project she would like to do on Zion cities, the cities established by independent churches called Zionists, across the continent. She recounted a visit she made to an isolated Kimbanguist community and a church in the DRC.

Her enthusiasm for research is infectious. She is also unusually reflective about her role as a white French-Italian woman doing research in Africa. I hope her reflectiveness stays with her as she advances. She regretted she had to turn down a job, due to a terrible car accident, at the University of Addis Ababa to teach African diaspora history and help with establishing a center for African studies. She hoped, however, that she would be able to go there for short teaching stints. She just learned this weekend that she got a research job at one of the leading institutes in Paris. This led to a discussion on differences in French and American systems of higher education: on the one hand, is the deceptive informality of the American system which she encountered when she spent a year at UCLA (where professors like to be called by their first names), behind which lies both hierarchal and baby-sitting tendencies that are injurious to young scholars, and on the other hand the apparent rigidity and formality of the French system (she could never imagine calling her supervision Elia M'Bokolo by his first name and he expected her to work on her own without too much interference from him) which can cultivate scholarly independence. She was keen to publish in English as well and recounted the rejection of an article by the *International Journal of African Historical Studies* and the hostile and unhelpful comments she received. She was fascinated to hear my comments on American academic culture, the politics of publishing, the competitive pressures within the hierarchy of institutions and the effects it has on research practices, ranging from limited investments in field research and overinvestment in theory, and the stressful and corrupting impacts of the "publish or perish" syndrome.

After she left I returned to the room to catch up on the day's online news. Interestingly, following the conclusion of the Democratic primaries, the U.S. political news has become less gripping. The general election contest between John McCain and Barack Obama has yet to catch on, but even if it does, it is unlikely to have the intense drama of the squabbles in the Democratic primaries, which brought the incendiary politics of race and class out in the open. Zimbabwe continues to descend further into the abyss. Surely, the region—the Southern African Development Community—and the continent—the African Union—can and should do something by warning Mugabe, in no uncertain terms, that his regime's terror campaign against the opposition will not be tolerated. This is not solidarity they are showing, but connivance with tyranny. African leaders are truly despicable in their criminal silence against this tin-pot, brutal dictator who has ruined his country for generations to come, all in the name of power. It is truly disheartening.

I had missed the music festival at the *malecón* at the harbor that played every night during the conference. I decided to go at 7:00 p.m. when the festival started. It was still very light out and the plaza by the hotel and the streets were filled with people and music. At one point, I saw people gathered in a tight circle. I wiggled my way through and saw a young man passionately beating his drum as he danced barefoot on the concrete pavement.

He was accompanied by two women, one who was as dark as I am and gyrating with the earth-shaking contortions of African music.

The seats at the festival were only beginning to fill up when I arrived. The crowd was already having a good time and shaking to the music of a band singing in Spanish. Families, couples, and gangs of youth and unattached individuals filled the arena facing the sea and huge container ships on one side, and sleek buildings adorned by statues on the other. Statues crop up everywhere, I had noticed the day I rode from the airport and walked along the sea walkway. Couples seemed to like walking while holding hands, I also noticed.

The Haitian band was somewhat of a disappointment. The lead male singer had a hoarse voice, which sounded discordant with the beautiful voices of the three women singers. The band came to the stage waving the Haitian flag—it was quite touching. The sounds, the dancing, everything about them looked decidedly African. This could have been a second-rate performance in any African town, certainly in Kenya or Malawi—the countries I am most familiar with. A wonderful distraction came when an elderly Afro-Mexican woman stopped by me and tried to strike up a conversation. Alas, language failed us.

I decided to go to bed a little early since I have to go to Córdoba very early tomorrow morning. I packed a small bag and ordered room service. My attempt to watch a TV movie, some unforgettable fare featuring Michael Douglas, didn't go far, and neither did watching CNN with their insufferable pundits. So I returned to Obama's *Audacity of Hope*.

June 16, 2008

The day started rather badly and ended reasonably well. It started with the fact that I couldn't get to sleep as early as I wanted to, something that seems to happen when I have an early morning trip. To make matters worse, there was loud noise from some hotel guests, shouting at the top of their lungs well past midnight as they went to their rooms, probably drunk. Before 5:00 in the morning noise from the same guests resumed; doors slamming and banging. I tried to go back to sleep after they left. Hardly had I succeeded when the alarm woke me up and I had to jump out of bed, bleary-eyed and rather irritable.

When I got to the bus station for ADO, a huge establishment with dozens of buses and hundreds of travelers, I was about to board the bus to Córdoba when the driver indicated I had the wrong ticket. I thought I had purchased a return ticket; it turned out it was a one-way ticket from Córdoba to Veracruz, not the other way round. I thought I had explained it clearly to the ticket salesperson at the pharmacy near the hotel last night. I guess my Spanish from the *Spanish Phrase Finder and Dictionary* pocketbook had not quite worked. I quickly went to the ticket counter and they exchanged my ticket. I was still able to leave at 9:00 a.m., as I had confirmed with Danielle via e-mail last night. Little did I know, as I boarded the bus, relieved I had made it this far without the proper language skills, that one and half hours later Danielle would not be at the ADO bus station in Córdoba.

For the next 90 minutes I slumped into my chair. It was a comfortable bus, even bordering on luxurious, with padded, sliding chairs, seat belts, and more leg room than

on most planes in economy class. There was even a video playing a Spanish dubbed movie, *Spiderman 3*, which I had tried to watch on cable at home once in Chicago but gave up after a few minutes. I occasionally found myself watching it, fascinated more by the Spanish the characters were speaking than the plot line, which has the complexity of a kindergarten text. Mostly I stared outside at the incredibly stunning countryside that rolled gently as the bus glided on the smooth, double-lane road; the grassy flatlands near Veracruz dotted with elegant palm trees jutting out from swampy soils gradually gave way to hilly landscape with silhouettes of distant mountains, lavishly covered with a dense foliage of forest. As we got closer to Córdoba, the views were often broken by picturesque umbrellas of mango trees hanging with fruit, rolling fields of sugarcane, citrus groves and ravines, and meandering, muddy rivers snaking their way somewhere. The breathtaking views were frequently interspersed with evidence of a less rosy human presence: tiny match-box houses and sometimes shacks, probably residences of the workers whose labors produce the postcard beauty of the landscape and its wealth. The distress of the human habitation became sharper as we entered the outskirts of Córdoba with their sugar plantations, mills, and shacks. The contrast became even sharper as I left Córdoba for Veracruz.

Danielle was nowhere to be seen at the bus station. For half an hour, I sat wondering what to do next. The idea of taking the next bus back to Veracruz crossed my mind. Having come this far, I decided I might as well explore the city for a couple of hours or so and then return to Veracruz. So I decided to walk to where I thought the city-center was located. At least, even without knowledge of Spanish, I could follow the signs, "Córdoba Centralo." I walked past the industrial area with its rusty looking factories followed by car repair and hardware stores, past the compact shops brimming with building materials and paint, household appliances, and colorful furniture, and past the crowded clothing and shoe stores, banks, office buildings, restaurants, and hotels. More than half an hour later I saw the city square with its landmark church, which was painted blue, a park, three-storied office buildings, and hotels only a story or two higher. By then I was famished and decided to have a meal in the restaurant of the most elegant-looking hotel overlooking the square. The waiter did not look particularly friendly, perhaps because when he asked me what I wanted I just grinned and pointed to an item on the menu. I didn't have enough time to ask for an English menu or check my translation pocketbook. At least I knew enough to ask for coffee. It turned out the meal was a piece of steak and beans. For starch, I ate a croissant.

Feeling fortified, I decided to walk around the square and find a bench under a shade to observe people. That's when I checked my Blackberry and saw an e-mail from Danielle saying she had seen my e-mail and was on the way to get me at the bus station. I e-mailed her right back to tell her where I was. I had given up on seeing her, so I was relieved at the possibility of turning my trip to Córdoba into a productive one after all.

The park was filled with mostly older people and school kids in a variety of uniforms. There was the occasional couple, teenagers mainly, holding hands, embracing, and whispering intimate desires to each other. Suddenly a young man sat on the other side of the metal bench where I was sitting. He was wearing earphones. He removed them and said "hola." I said "hola" back. "Speak English?" he asked. "Yes," I replied and asked him whether he spoke English. He shook his head, "a little," he said. There was an awkward silence. "Córdoba nice city," I tried to break the silence for I could tell he wanted to talk. "Yes, nice," he repeated, then he suddenly gave me a stare and looked me up and down. "I want dick," he blurted. I was so shocked, I screamed, "What?!" I shook my head violently.

"Are you crazy?" I turned to him, gesturing with my arms, "no, no." The last I had been propositioned by a man was in 1977. I had just arrived in London as a graduate student from Malawi. Seeing my agitation, the young man scurried away muttering, "I am sorry." I left the bench and went to sit on the side of the monument where several older men were sitting. None of them would try anything so silly in a group, I figured. That was where Danielle found me.

She was sweating and apologized. She lived in the countryside with her aunt where Internet service was not available. She only saw my message this morning when she went to Yanga. When she didn't find me at the ADO bus station she went into an Internet café, found my latest message, and had rushed straight here. I could see she was distraught so I tried to put her at ease. We joked about how dependent we have become on instant communication. Before long, she collected herself and outlined our schedule for the remaining part of the day. We took a taxi to interview the local librarian, who she had recommended when I first talked to her at the conference in Veracruz as one of the most knowledgeable people of Afro-Mexican history in the area. Also, she wanted me to see the statue of Yanga himself, the founder of the town that bears his name. We were so engrossed in conversation I didn't pay much attention to the places we passed by. Once she interrupted our conversation to point out a wall mural that sought to capture the history of the region with images of Spanish priests, colonial administrators, native people, and a black man breaking the chains of slavery.

For much of the trip that took 20–25 minutes, she explained her research. She was looking at elite black women in the region in the seventeenth century who owned property. She wanted to subvert the conventional historiography that depicts all black people as slaves, and black women as particularly degraded chattel. Her findings in the archives in Yanga, Xalapa, and Veracruz disturbed this narrative and showed the complexity and fluidity of racial, class, and gender dynamics in early colonial Mexico. I did not have enough time to ask questions, for we soon arrived at her grandfather's shop; actually, one small room was the shop and the other was a living room where the walls were adorned with family pictures and mementos. A small, graying, light-skinned man, he greeted us warmly. She explained what I was doing, but before we could talk, he wanted to attend to a customer. Danielle beckoned us to leave for the library to meet the librarian. We crossed the road toward the town square where loud music was playing. The library was on the second floor of a government building. The ubiquitous church was to our left, where we sat with the librarian, a slightly built man with a sparse beard and thick black hair, and a physical appearance verging more towards indigenous, and perhaps Spanish, than black.

Andres Maceda Martinez began by offering a general history of Yanga. The town was established a few miles from its present location in 1609, the first free black town in the Americas. It was called San Lorenzo de los Negros. For the first 30 years it existed largely as a Maroon society involved in many battles with the Spanish. In 1624, its name was officially changed to San Lorenzo de Cerralvo. The name Yanga was adopted in 1932. Several conditions were imposed by the state, one of which was that it be an exclusively free black town without mestizos or runaway slaves. It is not clear how much these conditions were enforced. Martinez later gave us a copy of the eleven conditions.

The community was largely self-sufficient in its early years, its economy was based on agriculture and dominated by tobacco, sugar cane, beans, and corn. Commercial relations existed with other settlements, and relations with towns such as Córdoba, were established

a few years earlier. No data exists on the size of the town, although up until the 1880s, it was predominantly populated by blacks. It is also not clear what were the nature of relations with nearby slave communities on the plantations or with the nearby indigenous communities. Freed blacks in New Spain were expected to carry freedom cards, but this does not appear to have been enforced so it is possible that runaway slaves moved into Yanga. Interactions with neighboring indigenous communities involved both cooperation and conflict. From the 1820s, indigenous people increasingly began migrating into the city and mixing with the two groups. Initially the people of Yanga were simply called blacks, but in the course of the nineteenth century, as interracial mixing intensified, *morenos* emerged as a significant proportion of Yanga's residents. Before the 1920s, the mixture was confined largely between blacks and Spanish who shared some similarities, especially language, which the blacks did not share with the natives who mostly spoke Nawa.

Independence in 1810 marked an important watershed in the history of Yanga and Mexico as a whole. The first president, a man of mixed African and native ancestry, abolished slavery in 1812, although as late as 1831 the Portuguese were caught with two slave ships that brought 600 slaves ashore. Social conditions improved following independence and abolition as the level of government support increased and more opportunities became available. Yanga's interactions with Córdoba and the port intensified. Another important historical watershed was the revolution of 1910, which brought more progress, including better road infrastructure, more schools, and increased job opportunities.

We spent a considerable amount of time discussing migration patterns and their impact on Yanga and Afro-Mexican communities in general. In recent decades, migrations have intensified. There are migrations to smaller towns in the region, especially the mining towns of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi and farther afield the towns of Mata Clara, Mirador, California, Arroyo Moreno, and Omealca, to as far as Mexico City and the industrial city of Queretaro. Most of the migrants are men aged 19–45; rarely do whole families migrate. A new phenomenon in recent years is the migration of women by themselves. Afro-Mexicans have also been migrating in increasing numbers to the U.S. Overall professionals tend to migrate within the country, while the unskilled go to the U.S.

The impact of migrations on Yanga and other Afro-Mexican communities is quite complex and contradictory. The families and communities left behind benefit from remittances. An association founded by the migrants purchased an ambulance and a school bus. Migrant influences can also be seen in the style of housing, as some seek to replicate Californian houses, he said. On the less positive side, there is a severe shortage of men and skilled professionals. He mentioned schools having one teacher for six grades. Clearly, migration not only affects the quality of education offered but also discourages children from investing in their own education as they see migration as a more rewarding option. The impact on gender relations is intriguing. Women obviously have assumed control over many aspects of family life and their own lives. Since men often only return for short periods, their capacity to assert their patriarchal authority is limited. He was not sure of the effects of the migrations, specifically those to the United States, on the growth of black identities. He observed there was a generational and identity gap between those who stayed behind, who were mostly older and darker, and those who migrated, who were younger and more mixed.

He was adamant that racial discrimination was not an issue here. Indigenous people were more discriminated against than blacks. In the meantime, he stressed the growing importance of the Carnival of Yanga in the growth and assertion of the town's black

history and identity. The carnival started in 1976 as a few days of partying for young people. In the 1990s, it evolved into a celebration of black history. This was in part facilitated by government support and a belated official recognition of Mexico's African heritage. Recently, the carnival is accompanied by a small conference at which university experts on Yanga come to educate the people on Yanga's history. Also, during these conferences the town's social conditions are discussed, including health conditions—sickle cell, diabetes, and hypertension—that have a particular bearing on the black population. Unlike Costa Chica, however, these historical and cultural celebrations have not found strong expression in a black political movement in Yanga. Part of the reason could be that Costa Chica has a much larger black population.

Reinforcing black identity in the town are episodic migrations and visits by Afro-descendants from the Caribbean and Central America. While there is not a lot of movement, let alone migrations to and from the Caribbean, periodic visits do occur. He mentioned sixteen Jamaicans who visited for ten days who were interested in black history. More recently, there have been migrations of black people from Honduras and Guatemala who come to work in the service industry as taxi drivers and security guards, and live normally among the residents of Yanga.

We concluded by discussing Africa: how the residents of Yanga imagine Africa and what they know about the continent of their ancestors. He began by noting that there were no particular cultural practices or traditions that were commonly identified as African, as such. People simply thought of their culture as derived from Yanga's own history, as part of Mexican culture. However, Danielle offered, clearly many cultural practices from dancing, to drumming, to food were African-derived. She suggested a friend of hers who has done extensive research on this as someone I should talk to. When Africa is mentioned, people in Yanga think of black people, animals, and safaris, Martinez said. Egypt is known but is not often associated with Africa. The images of Africa that are circulated are largely positive and neutral, but there are also a lot of negative images associated with war and poverty. Overall, people do not really know much about Africa because Africa is not taught in schools. Visits to the town of Yanga by Africans are rare, as are visits to Africa by people from Yanga. Exceptions include a visit to the town by a Senegalese who had come to teach drumming. He was tall, thin and dark and the children were initially nervous around him—his height, physique, and color created quite a spectacle in a place of relatively short, stocky, and brown-skinned people. Martinez mentioned someone called Florentine who had gone somewhere in Africa, he wasn't too sure where. And Danielle mentioned a group of students from Xalapa who had also gone to some African country for two weeks to learn percussion and dance, and they came back and performed brilliantly.

We talked for nearly three hours on the veranda overlooking the square. It was hot, but the humidity had relented. The music had long since stopped. I thanked Martinez profusely for taking so much of his time to talk to me. Occasionally, we had been interrupted when he had to dash into the library to help someone, or when a couple of people stopped by, one, a black woman who seemed disappointed when she heard I didn't speak Spanish, and the other, a young man in his twenties who had studied in California in the U.S.

From the library, we made our way along the narrow streets to see Yanga's imposing statue. Holding a cutlass in one hand and a cane in another, Yanga's fierce eyes and tall, taut body stare with a defiant determination for freedom. The grounds containing the statue are elaborately maintained, although the basketball court appeared a little discordant.

Danielle lives in the countryside with an aunt. The deeper in the countryside you go, she said, the darker the people are. She talked a little about her own family and background, her ambitions to work in California after completing her dissertation in 2011 to be closer to her family, and the challenges of negotiating an identity as a daughter of an African-American father and an Afro-Mexican mother.

Seeing as the main purpose of my visit to Córdoba and Yanga had been completed, I decided to return to Veracruz. I thanked Danielle for her assistance and took a taxi back to the bus station in Córdoba. I arrived just in time to purchase a ticket for the 6:05 p.m. bus. I slid into my chair with a big bottle of water and marveled, once again, at the landscape. By the time we arrived in what now looked like a very big city, I felt like a pro, proud that I had made the journey with my non-existent Spanish. I got into a taxi at ADO and headed back to the hotel. After a shower, I went to the restaurant where I was the only customer.

June 17, 2008

This was a day of relaxation, reflection, and reading. I had hoped to wake up late and take a leisurely breakfast by the veranda of the hotel. But at 8:25 a.m., so the bedside clock showed, I was awoken by an international phone call. By the time I finished talking, I was fully awake, even more determined than ever to rest.

Rest meant staying in the room for the next few hours reading, first online news and then Obama's *Audacity of Hope*. His intelligence is unquestionable, the clarity and eloquence of his writing impressive, but his moderation is increasingly troubling. When I could take the book no more, I took a shower and went for a meal on the veranda. The dish, a mixed seafood salad, was delicious. And despite the heat, I helped myself to a couple of cups of coffee.

I decided to walk around, initially looking for a local museum, but despite getting directions from the reception, I got lost and couldn't find it. It was unbearably hot and humid. My mission changed to shopping, if nothing else to take some respite from the scorching sun in the mostly air-conditioned shops. I was looking for a suit of a white shirt and pants I had seen some men wear, elegant and chic. I bought one in Miami last December. In one shop I found the shirt but no pants; the shirt wasn't cheap—the equivalent of U.S. \$140. In another I found both a shirt and pants, but the pants were too big. I didn't even bother to inquire about the price. By the time I returned to the hotel room more than an hour later, I was in a sweat, so I cranked up the air conditioner.

Wondering what to read next and reluctant to go back to Obama's *Audacity*, I decided to read commentaries on Obama to help me frame my thoughts on the meaning and implications of his nomination and possible presidency for the eSymposium to be posted soon on *The Zeleza Post*. I have received six commentaries from the regular bloggers and am expecting a few more. I haven't read them yet, so as to avoid influencing my thoughts. I have a growing feeling that were he to be elected, an Obama administration would be unlikely to meet expectations of those wishing for substantive transformations in American domestic and foreign policy.

Then it occurred to me that I could spend the rest of the evening after dinner—which I ate at the hotel where the conference had been held for a change of scenery, and to

celebrate news from Natasha that she probably got a job, which, once confirmed, will be the best news I have had for a long time—to read a book the librarian had showed me, a copy of which I had bought at the conference. A lavishly illustrated volume, *The African Presence in Mexico: from Yanga to the Present*, is the companion volume to an exhibition of the same name shown at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago and later in Monterrey and Albuquerque. It is a wonderful collection, the engravings, paintings and pictures offering an exuberant portrait of Afro-Mexican history and culture. The introductory essay by Sagrario Cruz-Carretero, whom I had met at the conference but had unfortunately been unable to interview, provided a masterly overview, covering the main developments and debates in Afro-Mexican history, whose outline I had become increasingly familiar with. There are three other excellent essays: one titled “Afro-Mexican Depiction and Identity in the Visual Arts,” another titled “Who Are We Now? Roots, Resistance, and Recognition,” and finally “Racism in Mexico: Exposing the Myths.” I skimmed through the last two, which I plan to read more systematically later.

I am now more acutely aware of some of the challenges of identifying and discussing African diaspora in countries like Mexico, where African-descended populations have been dispersed and made invisible through the mystifications and realities of race mixing. This, of course, is applicable only if we reduce Africanness to blackness, to Negroid phenotype, which is how Africanness is understood in the Americas based on the history of the Atlantic slave trade that brought the bulk of Africans to these shores until recent times. And what right do scholars have to call people black or Afro-descendants when such people deny such an identity? Of course, one can make the old Marxian distinction between class-in-itself, an objective condition, and class-for-itself, a subjective positioning. Even when such populations deny their African origins, they remain, objectively, people of African descent, even if only partially.

This conviction can of course be transformed into a consciousness, a diasporic identity, as seems to be happening in Mexico itself where the category Afro-Mexican is increasingly recognized by the state, scholars, and the communities themselves that are being described as such. This underscores one point I made in the essay “Rewriting the African Diaspora,” but whose import is now clearer. Diaspora is both a condition and a process. Diasporization has spatial and discursive dimensions: some peoples become diasporas long after the original dispersals, and while racialization remains critical in framing African diaspora identities in the Americas, cultural and social identities are equally and sometimes even more salient, as evidenced from the one-drop rule in the U.S. and increasingly among people previously identified as Mestizos in Latin America. I can’t wait to go to Europe and Asia and see how these dynamics play out, especially as the Africans who have migrated to these regions historically, and in contemporary times, have been quite diverse in their phenotypes.

June 18, 2008

Last days, when a trip has been good and productive, are always somewhat sad. There is the anticipation of returning to the familiarities of home and the dread of leaving behind the excitement of discovery and new experiences. After packing my bags, I went to have my last meal by the veranda. Although it was lunch hour, I ordered breakfast. At 2:00 p.m. I checked out of the hotel.

The taxi took me on a different route to the airport from the one I had taken the day I arrived. We passed through narrow roads before joining the main highway. On each side of the neighborhoods we passed through were compact houses of uneven states of newness and disrepair, single storied and double storied, interspersed with grocery stores, repair shops, restaurants, churches, and schools. The traffic was quite heavy. It took us 40 minutes to get to the airport. I was several hours early and I was offered an earlier flight to Mexico City which was leaving in 45 minutes; I gladly accepted. As the plane glided into the air, I took a panoramic view of Veracruz. From the air, neighborhoods looked orderly: square grids broken up by green zones and factory sheds. It was a reasonably large city. Landing in Mexico City gave me even more spectacular views of this massive, sprawling metropolis than I had seen on my way in, with its conglomeration of buildings of all shapes and colors braided with trees and highways. I will have to visit the city one of these days.

Having arrived so early, I had a long layover at the airport which I spent making a fruitless search for my white shirt and pants—all the clothing stores had the usual stuff you can buy in any men's shop in Chicago. Then I treated myself to dinner and resumed reading Obama, which I finally finished. He is certainly brilliant, but a brilliant politician, a brilliant American politician. If his analysis of the challenges facing the United States at home, especially the crises of inner city for the African-American poor and illegal immigration for Latinos, left me impressed by his understanding of the stakes but not entirely convinced by his middling solutions. His analysis of America's foreign policy was deeply disappointing, especially his perfunctory remarks on Africa which evokes in him, he states, cynicism and despair. He sees Africa as the embodiment of the pathologies of poverty, corruption and dysfunctional states, a breeding ground for new viruses and terrorism, desperately in need of the modernizing and disciplining opportunities of free market liberal democracy. I expected more from him. If Obama cannot transcend such conventional stereotypes then we are in deeper trouble than I thought.

The flight was smooth. Having eaten, I declined the dinner and neither did I feel like watching the horrible animated film they showed. For the next few hours, I preoccupied myself with reading the tenure dossier for Eunice Sahle of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Julius Nyang'oro, the department head, had sent a desperate e-mail requesting my evaluation by Friday. I don't recall ever agreeing to do it, but in the spirit of intellectual brotherhood, I promised to have the evaluation ready soon after I returned to Chicago. The papers were surprisingly good, theoretically sophisticated, empirically rich, analytically compelling, and well written. One was on the gendered dynamics of the colonial and postcolonial state and the market, another on NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) as emblematic of the African elite and its discursive integration into the global elite despite their critiques of features of imperialism and global capitalism; and yet another was on the intellectual history of development studies and the contexts within which crisis emerged in development theory which gave rise to so-called post-development discourses. I had met Eunice once at a conference in Montreal last year, but didn't form any strong impressions from our brief encounter.

We landed after 2:00 a.m. Half an hour later I was home and the trip to Mexico was over.

Germany

June 21, 2008

I woke up feeling quite upbeat about the trip to Germany. But the feeling did not last. Initially, everything seemed to be under control. I had been in touch with all my German contacts, including the prospective research assistant. My clothes were packed—or rather, the bag from the Mexico trip was left unpacked except for the dirty clothes.

In the rush to make final preparations for the trip, I delayed calling the taxi. Thankfully, Cassandra agreed to take me downtown to catch a taxi at the same Greyhound bus terminal at which I had picked up Natasha. Hardly had I gotten out of the car and got into a taxi when I remembered I had forgotten the file Cassandra had given me at the last minute to put my travel documents in—flight itinerary, hotel booking, and German contacts. She shook her head with much exasperation as I cursed myself for being so forgetful. She was a good sport, for she agreed that after picking up the file I could drive her car to the airport and she would come with me.

Little did I know when we got to the international terminal, the morning's drama was not yet over. I learned that Lufthansa flew out of Terminal 1, not Terminal 5, although there was a Lufthansa sign at Terminal 5. I took the rail to Terminal 1, only to be shuttled from Lufthansa to United, although my itinerary said I was on Lufthansa. No, the Lufthansa woman said, their flight flew at 3:27 p.m.; United flew at 2:27 p.m. My flight was at 2:27 p.m. By the time all this drama was over and I went through security, it was time to board. I was relieved enough to treat all the day's mishaps as a bad joke. Not even the patch of terrible turbulence the plane went through seemed to bother me. But I drew a line at having a conversation with the man sitting next to me by the aisle, a heavy-set man from Nebraska who gulped one Diet Coke after another. The person sitting on my left was an elderly Japanese woman who seemed particularly anxious to talk and leaned toward her husband.

I buried myself in the magazines I had bought just before boarding, starting with the gossip tabloid rack, *Us Weekly*, which featured Michelle and Barack Obama posing endearingly at the camera, with a cheesy caption, "Michelle Obama, Why Obama Loves Her." Then I gravitated to the dumbed-down *Time*, whose lead story, "The Great Wall of America," captured the inanity of America's immigration policy and its relations with Mexico. I left the best for last, the venerable *The Economist*, which still writes as if ideas and seriousness matter, even if I often disagree with the opinions expressed. But the writing is intelligent and the headings often pithily funny. It featured an article titled, "The Future of Energy," including a fourteen-page special report on the subject. I decided to write a blog on energy that I have been thinking of doing for a while. Trying to take a break by watching a movie proved unsuccessful: the feature I caught was on Middle Eastern terrorists. I gave up after ten minutes or so; it dripped with grotesque stereotypes. More successful was an attempt to fall asleep, which I did for a while as the time difference from Chicago widened across the Atlantic.

June 22, 2008

We landed in Frankfurt at 5:30 a.m. after being served a miserable excuse for breakfast, a dry bun and a tiny container of fruit. The layover was too short to have a supplementary breakfast at one of the fine coffee shops and restaurants in this large and almost chic-looking airport. A polite young German man stamped my passport and said, "Welcome to Germany," while an older, tall black man checked my boarding pass and gave me a brotherly smile as I was sent through security. It was a promising, good start. Not even a request by one of the passengers on the next flight to switch seats bothered me. I gave up my aisle seat and sat between him and his friend. He was fat and needed the extra space, he pointed to his protruding belly. He was from Tunisia, he said in his heavily accented English. Brothers from the continent, I said to myself. There were a couple of black men on the flight as well, most likely from the continent, I concluded. Hardly had we taken off than the fat man from Tunisia started snoring. Thankfully, it was a short flight.

The Berlin airport seemed smaller than the Frankfurt airport. A circular, picturesque outfit, it resembles a suburban mall with its shops and restaurants. I changed some money into euros. It hit me how far the dollar has fallen. In 2002, when I last visited Germany, the dollar was a little higher than the euro. At the exchange bureau, I was offered a rate of 0.68 to the dollar. "I am giving you a special rate," said the teller, a cheerful Chinese-looking woman. She tried to sound earnest but I knew she was humoring me; I thanked her with a smile.

The weather outside was simply beautiful, warm enough for only a shirt, as I was wearing. There was a sea of cream-colored taxis, mostly Mercedes Benzes. This is truly the land of the Mercedes Benz, the status symbol of post-colonial Africa. The taxi driver was a friendly man. How is New York, he asked. I told him I was coming from Chicago. Did I look like a New Yorker, or an American? But what do New Yorkers and Americans look like, I reproached myself.

Back on the airplane, as we descended, I noticed how green the city looked. Now as we drove from the airport to the hotel, I noticed trees everywhere until we got closer to the city center, the *Mitte*, where I had booked my hotel. Relatively sizeable, the hotel, Mercure, had the feel of understated elegance with its silver and teak fixtures. The room was exceptionally clean and had a pleasant atmosphere enhanced by its light furniture and darker, matching fluffy carpet. I took a shower and went for the morning breakfast, which was still being served: a buffet, to which I helped myself amply. I was the only black person in the restaurant. There was an Asian family. The rest were white, Germans, and foreign tourists. The staff, both in the restaurant and at the reception, was very friendly. Above all, they spoke English. This is going to be easier than I thought, I said to myself. I felt less powerless than I did in Mexico. The power of language, of communication, I sighed.

After breakfast I decided to tour the immediate neighborhood, I walked up the street, Invalidenstrasse, to the massive Berlin Central Station, Hauptbahnhof, around it; across the bridge to the famous Reichstag building, the heart of German democracy, as the brochure I collected at the footsteps of the Reichstag proclaimed. The parliamentary quarter, the Bundestag, consists of the Reichstag and Paul Lobe buildings. The brochure proclaimed that with about 3 million visitors a year, it is the world's most-visited parliament. Perhaps after its imperial governments, including the brutal Nazi dictatorship, caused so

much pain and suffering to their fellow Europeans, not to mention their erstwhile colonial peoples in Africa, Germans need to pray for democracy regularly. This being a Sunday, the crowds were relatively modest. Walking through them I hardly saw any black people, while American accents seemed well represented. Standing on the steps of the Reichstag, a vast vista opens: a park reminiscent of the mall in Washington, D.C., a little greener perhaps and with far fewer monuments.

I walked back to the massive glass and steel structure of the Hauptbahnhof. On the banks of the river were several outdoor restaurants, but they were relatively empty. Several tour boats were either docked by the banks of the Spree River or sailing slowly and leisurely along. Inside the Hauptbahnhof, were masses of people checking schedules on monitors or rushing for their trains. There were tons of shops and restaurants, I entered a couple of shops, but quickly got out, shocked by the prices.

I got back to the hotel almost two hours later after I had gone for my walking tour. I settled into contacting the people I wanted to meet and set up appointments with. After that, I wrote a blog on the oil crisis and posted it.

The restaurant in the hotel does not seem to serve dinner, so I ordered a snack of sausages and chips. The rest of the evening was spent catching up on BBC World News. The situation in Zimbabwe gets more desperate by the day. I became more convinced than ever that Africa needs to act decisively, as I wrote in a blog on Friday, by imposing sanctions on this tyrannical renegade regime.

June 23, 2008

By noon, none of my contacts had gotten back to me for an appointment. So I decided to do a bit of touring the city. Using the complimentary train ticket the hotel had given me when I checked in, I decided to take the underground to the city center. I was told at the lobby to get off at Französische Strasse from Zinnowitzer Strasse near the hotel.

When I got off, I followed Friedrichstrasse south, not knowing exactly where I was going. On both sides of the wide, multi-lane roads were expensive shops, some with brand name marquees, and office blocks and banks. Few were above five or six stories, but the place reeked of money. Many looked newly renovated. I later found out that this was part of the old East Berlin, which had been undergoing renovations since reunification in 1991.

I stopped by a couple of stores out of curiosity. One advertised a bookstore, but the books consisted of oversized, lavishly illustrated coffee table books; I saw one on the Sahara; another on Grace Jones, the Jamaican androgynous entertainer. Further down the road, at the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Niederkirchnerstr I bumped into the renowned Cold War landmark, Checkpoint Charlie. Both sides of the road were filled with large billboards telling and showing with photographs the dramatic history of the Berlin Wall and the Cold War. A story I was familiar with from school textbooks, one that emphasized the struggles by western democracies, led by the United States and West Germany, against the tyrannical forces of communism and East Germany.

It began with the Berlin crisis and airlift of 1947. Construction of the notorious wall started in 1961 after 2.5 million people had fled from the East to the West between 1949 and 1961. This was followed by the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, followed by depictions

of proxy wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and even Africa, the popular uprisings of 1968 in Poland and Czechoslovakia and their brutal suppression; the détente of the 1970s and negotiations and disarmament programs; the emergence of reform movements, especially *perestroika* and *glasnost* following the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR and Solidarity in Poland, culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall the night of November 9, 1989, and the reunification of the two Germanys in 1990 and the departure of the last Allied troops in 1994. There were also displays on posters across the road showing successful and failed escapes from East Berlin to West Berlin and some of the martyred individuals. Between 1961 and 1988 there were a staggering 110,000 proceedings against deserters, and 71,000 sentences were imposed.

The place was swarming with tourists taking pictures and vendors selling memories of repression, commoditized images of the good and bad guys of Cold War history. Even I seemed eager to consume this history: I bought an illustrated book containing the exhibit I had just walked by. Standing ahead stood a replica of the old American checkpoint manned by two bored young men in American military uniforms. Above them hangs a bright picture of a white American soldier staring with self-righteousness and determination. Further down was a museum adorned with pieces from the demolished wall. Behind the ticket counter was a list of the famous and mighty who had visited the museum over the years, from President Reagan of the U.S. to President Musharaf of Pakistan, beacons of freedom, indeed. I was tempted to purchase a ticket but I discovered I had not brought any money with me except for a few coins.

I continued walking in the old West Berlin. Many of the buildings increasingly looked like apartment buildings. I decided to walk back to kill time and for a little exercise. I would have loved to stop by one of the numerous cafés, enjoy a drink, and watch the crowds walk by. I could manage only a bottle of water from the kiosk along one of the parks. Arriving back at the hotel three hours after I had left, I found two confirmations for meetings for tomorrow. It was about time, I felt relieved.

June 24, 2008

I went to meet the young filmmaker, Otu Tetteh, at his apartment in the middle-class neighborhood of Westend. I left the hotel just before 10:00 a.m., taking the U-Bahn line from Zinnowitzer strasse and changing to the S-Bahn line and disembarking at Wedding. I initially walked in the wrong direction; north on Sophie Charlotten, before turning back close to the dead-end dotted with factories and car show rooms. I made it to the five-story apartment building on Seeling on time. He buzzed me in just before 11:00 a.m.

I immediately took a liking to him for his friendliness and warm welcome. A little taller than me and rather skinny, he wore a short-sleeved, multicolored West African shirt. With his cropped hair and easy smile he resembled Obama. He took me to the deck and offered me coffee and a glass of water. It looked like a spacious apartment, sparsely furnished with a touch of organized chaos. From the fourth-floor deck, we faced other apartment buildings and a patch of green tranquility. Except for the rustling leaves of the trees, it was blissfully quiet. The sun warmed the cool air gently.

I thanked him for agreeing to see me and told him I was particularly thrilled as he was my first interview. I explained the scope of my project and the issues on which I was

interested in getting his views: first, the size of the Afro-German diaspora (its origins, composition and internal relations); second, the community's interaction with the wider German society (interpersonal and institutional, e.g., in occupational and educational settings, political and cultural); third, its linkages with Africa (images of Africans, symbolic and concrete engagements with Africa).

He was forthcoming with opinions, details of his experiences, suggestions for additional people to talk to, and sources of information. His English was good, although he would occasionally check a dictionary for the proper word or phrase. He was serious and funny, passionate and irreverent. He clearly enjoyed the interview and so did I. It was moments like this where I feel these trips are worth it, the joys of conversation, of interaction, of discovering the life of one fascinating member of Africa's far-flung diaspora.

Otu Tetteh was born in 1972, the son of a Ghanaian-Liberian man and a German woman. He began by introducing his father and his accidental sojourn into Germany. He did not talk much about his mother. Like Obama in his memoirs, he seemed preoccupied, intrigued by his father, but unlike Obama, he knew his father intimately and was clearly proud of him. His grandfather on his father's side had migrated to Liberia from Ghana after the Second World War in search of business opportunities. He was apparently successful, benefitting from connections with the Liberian political elite, and acquired a lot of property. His son, Otu's father, got a scholarship to study in Lebanon. He was about 24 years old when he finished his studies with a degree in the sciences and mathematics. He was expected to go back to Liberia to teach. It was while on his way back to Liberia that a friend suggested they go through Germany. It was to prove a fateful decision. During what was expected to be a brief stay, his father found a university where he was accepted to study architecture. Later he met Otu's mother, and the rest, he laughed, was history. His parents always insisted they would return to Liberia.

Otu's father was unable to go back to Liberia as quickly as he had hoped. First, his studies took longer than he anticipated. He sought to write a dissertation on the economics of urban planning and development in Liberia, a topic that did not appeal to his professors. Matters were made worse first, by the death of his first supervisor and the unsympathetic attitudes of his second supervisor, and second, by his inadequate command of German. He became quite depressed the longer it took him to finish the dissertation. It was sad to see him in that state, Otu said. When civil war started in Liberia, his plans to return were further delayed.

Throughout the years, the father maintained contacts with Liberia. The family visited in 1980, when Otu was eight years old. That was the year Samuel Doe seized power. The political situation was terrible and Liberians were prevented from leaving the country. It was a stressful time for his mother. Three weeks later the father was able to leave. He later wrote a book, entitled, *Liberia: Diary of a Civil War or This Business of Chopping Ourselves* (published in Berlin in 1999). Many years later, in 2005, Otu went with his father for his first visit to Ghana. He saw a side of his father he rarely saw, an animated, excited man full of dreams. The trip activated something wonderful in him. The father is now back in Liberia trying to implement plans that remained on hold for 30 years. The situation in Liberia has greatly improved since the end of the war and the installation of the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female president. His father currently lives in the house of the uncle of Liberia's current ambassador to Germany. That's how interconnected the Liberian diaspora is, Otu said. His father first came to Berlin in 1965 and the family lived in the same neighborhood where Otu is now living

with his wife and two-year-old son. His wife, a white woman, briefly popped in to say hello to me and give him a kiss. The son was in day care.

When his father first came to Berlin, there were few people of African descent in the city, perhaps five to ten, Otu said, although he sounded unsure of the number and promised to check. There were now perhaps 30,000; again he promised to check the accurate figure, noting jokingly that Germans like to keep accurate statistics. In every class in Berlin, you can find an Afro-German child or two, he noted based on his fatherly observations. Most Afro-Germans today are children of recent immigrants, although an African diaspora population has existed in the country for a long time. He identified three broad groups in terms of social origins of Afro-Germans: first, the offspring of African students, many who came from African middle and upper classes; second, children of African-American soldiers stationed in Germany since the Second World War; and third, asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants and their progeny. The condition of the latter is often precarious, especially outside Berlin and the other large cities. In the rural areas, they are often put in isolated camps where they are not allowed to move around and find jobs. They are subject to extreme forms of racial treatment, and their conditions are of grave concern to refugee organizations, which seek to help them, and are frequently discussed on Afro-German Internet sites. The majority of Afro-Germans live in Berlin, Hamburg, and a few other major cities.

Given its diverse national and social origins, relations within the Afro-German community are complicated and not always harmonious. There used to be silly debates, as Otu characterized them, on what to call the community—Negro, black, or Afro-German. The latter two are the preferred terms. He told of his surprise of hearing the use of *Negro* or *nigger* when he visited Ghana and Liberia recently. There are differences and sometimes tensions between immigrants and German born Afro-Germans. Among the former, he found Africans a lot friendlier than African Americans, especially soldiers who would often not respond if you greeted or waved to them. This apparently changed with the rise of hip hop; now the American soldiers respond if you use hip hop gestures and lingo. There are language problems among African immigrants, some who are from French-speaking countries. Another challenge concerns Afro-German youth, who are left by their African fathers and raised by white German mothers. Such kids are not connected to the African part of their family history and when they grow up, they reject either their black or white heritage. It is important for people of mixed racial backgrounds to recognize that they are both white and black and to avoid exclusive choices, he stressed.

As he grew up and became politically aware, he realized that the Afro-German community has been handicapped by their inability to speak with one voice. There are a lot of organizations that have emerged dealing with Afro-German issues culturally, politically, and economically. They do not always agree on their tactics and agenda. One issue on which there is considerable dispute concerns whether or not to allow the involvement of white Germans. The need for a more unified voice is imperative to lobby for the collective interests of the Afro-German community as a whole even as the different organizations lobby for their specific constituencies.

I asked whether North Africans were included in the category of Afro-Germans. He hesitated that they were considered part of a separate community. They had relations with other Africans of Muslim faith but they did not constitute part of the Afro-German community, as such, which was largely seen to be composed of people of sub-Saharan origins, either those with one or both parents from sub-Saharan Africa, or who came as

kids, such as the renowned football player Asemoa. African-born or Afro-Germans can decide at age eighteen which nationality to adopt. Otu's brother holds two passports: German and Liberian.

On interactions with German society, he noted contradictory tendencies. Personally, he had not experienced overt racism except for the occasional staring. Sadly, though, he had noticed the growing racism in German society following the reunification, which generated a surge of patriotism that found expression, especially in the former East Germany, in the growth of right wing politics. Such politics was deemed revolutionary, a badge of citizenship in the new unified Germany. Parts of Germany have become quite scary in terms of their racism. When one of his films was being screened in some regions of the country, he was afraid, not knowing whether to go by car or by train. Even parts of Berlin now scare him. About 130 people have been killed in racial attacks; he promised to check the exact number. In fact, the growth of racism and racial violence inspired one of his films, which features confrontations between racial minorities and racist white youths. This problem is discussed a lot in the Afro-German community.

There are, of course, a lot of positive interactions between Afro-Germans and the wider society, he stressed. There are a lot of Germans who are very well educated and widely traveled who are open minded and who are honestly and respectfully interested in other cultures. Living and interacting with such people is quite easy and you don't have to be scared. German women who marry foreigners are certainly interested in other cultures, he smiled mischievously. Racial relations tend to be much better in the large cities than in the smaller ones. Berlin's multiculturalism often comes alive during the Carnival of Cultures, which brings 200,000–300,000 people, and all sorts of communities from Asia, Latin America, and Africa are represented. You see a lot of Afro-Germans at the carnival, and whites too. Germans love it.

Afro-Germans work in all sectors of the economy and society. He mentioned several prominent Afro-Germans that he knows about; one is a science professor from Ghana, one of only five people in the country working in his advanced field of cell research; a lawyer; and talk show hosts on TV. Many more Afro-Germans, he conceded, work in relatively low-paying and menial jobs in the service industry.

At this point, he discussed the challenges he had faced in establishing himself as a film maker, a career that was relatively closed to blacks. He would have had better luck if he had been a musician. He was unable to go to film school, for out of 400 applications, they only take 10. He only managed to gain entrance to a short-term workshop together with another Afro-German woman. Also difficult was securing enough capital for film production, which is often expensive.

Afro-German and African issues are not handled as well as they could be by German political parties and the government. Interest has grown recently following racial riots in France and elsewhere in Europe. The left wing parties show the greatest interest, the Greens and even the SPD (Social Democratic Party). They have Afro-German supporters and leaders but most of them are young and in lowly positions. The time is ripe for more visibility and greater involvement in dealing with issues of concern to the Afro-Germans. The general society is ill-informed about Africa. Their knowledge of Africa comes from the media. Africa usually forms the backdrop of romantic German films, shown at least once a month in which a German couple falls in love abroad. Alternatively, Africa represents exotica to spruce up consumer goods, including potato chips called *chakalaka*! Africa, in short, is seen as mysterious at best. When it comes to the hard issues facing the continent,

they are discussed in a hypocritical, superficial, and repetitive ways; and so every year the Sudan or any popular crisis is discussed for two or three days without any follow up.

On the other hand, there are Germans who work on African issues honestly. He mentioned one actor who is doing good work in Somalia, building a hospital; he apparently lives with a Somali woman. And there is a friend of his father who fell in love with Liberia where he spent \$10,000 to build a school in a small village and received a Kissi name! Such individuals may of course be motivated by selfish motives for recognition and appreciation that they do not get in their own society, at relatively low cost, but as long as there are mutual benefits, such philanthropic vanity may be forgiven. The interplay of moral and economic intervention is not always easy to disentangle. This works on both sides. Many Germans favorably disposed toward Africa may use it to advance their own interests. In Africa itself, there are also NGOs that have mushroomed in recent years that have limited connections with the societies they claim to represent and on whose behalf they seek to raise money. When he went to Liberia in 2005, Otu found 250 NGOs in Monrovia. The foreigners who work with the NGOs often jump from their hotels to the jeeps and never really get to know and interact with the local society. All this sometimes leaves him skeptical of German relations with Africa.

This provided a good segue to engagements between Afro-Germans and Africa. Many Afro-Germans who have not been to the continent harbor negative images and stereotypes fed to them by the media, he said. To them, Africa is the land of disease, war, and hunger. The media never shows African countries doing well. Alternatively, the images of Africa or blackness are mediated through U.S. black culture and the filters of race and racialized representations. In his case, he knew better because he heard alternative stories about Africa from his father. But even he held a lot of prejudices about African pathologies. He had not been to Africa since 1980. When he returned in 2004, he worried that people would steal his camera, he was afraid of the mosquitoes, water, and that he couldn't eat the food. As he talked, I was reminded of Natasha's similar fears when she came with Cassandra and me to Malawi and South Africa in December 2006. But when he arrived in Ghana, it was extraordinary the way he was welcomed. Everywhere he went he was treated with incredible generosity. The cab driver in whose car he had left a pack of cigarettes even returned the pack two weeks after he found it! Perhaps things went so well because he was surrounded and protected by his father's family. But he couldn't help reproaching himself for the prejudices that had gnawed at his expectations of Ghana during his flight.

His experiences have reinforced his passion to create more honest representations of Africa in Germany and of Germany in Ghana and Liberia. Black filmmakers have a crucial role in transcending the clichés and stereotypes with which Afro-German communities and Africa are represented in the media. He elaborated on the challenges facing Afro-German filmmakers, ranging from the lack of financial resources to distribution outlets. He has had trouble placing his films at film festivals in Germany and across Europe. Better representations of Africa in Germany will enable Afro-Germans to become more interested in the continent and in investing in Africa, and it will improve their place and image in Germany. At the same time, it is also important for black filmmakers to correct the image of Europe in Africa as a land of paradise, which stokes emigration dreams which sometimes end up in the nightmare of illegal migration and asylum camps.

He stressed the need for black filmmakers and other Afro-German constituencies to build strong lobbying associations to advance their specific and collective interests. For

him, his primary interest was making films and connecting to Ghana and Liberia specifically, not to Africa as a whole. He knows many Afro-Germans of his age and social background who have plans of going back and establishing enterprises in the countries of their parents' origin in Africa. He saw incredible opportunities when he went to Liberia and Ghana to make movies. He mentioned the successful Nigerian musician, Adé Bantu, who spends half a year each in Germany and Ghana; the Brothers Keepers, and others who move back and forth between Germany and African countries. The magic is to combine German organization and African ingenuity. Many Afro-Germans are also interested in influencing African politics and issues concerning Africa to attract a lot of attention in the community.

Besides Africa, the United States exerts a strong pull for Afro-Germans. Not only do U.S. representations of blackness affect Afro-German perceptions of black culture, they directly impact cultural practices, especially music. As he grew up, the black cultural icons shifted from Michael Jackson, to Bob Marley, to a Dutch, black football player whose name I didn't catch. Their fellow white German schoolmates always compared him to these global, black, cultural icons. He emphasized the need for the Afro-German community to travel more to the rest of the black world, including Africa. Travel is not important only for the purposes of tourism, but it enhances understanding, it brings the world together.

We concluded our two-and-a-half-hour conversation with a discussion of his films. His interest started in school, during which he participated in various productions as an actor. After school, he worked in art departments on over 50 film projects. His first film, a fifteen-minute documentary on clashes between multicultural and fascist youth groups, *Dess or Alaif*, was produced with a budget of \$1,500 in 2002. He sent it to 30–40 film festivals. He was ignored until 2003 when he was called by *Premiere Berlinale* to show it in the Panorama section. It cost him an additional \$6,000 to turn the DVD into a 35 mm film. It won the "Best Movie" award for Black International Film.

This was followed in 2005 by a 50-minute documentary, *Papa Africa*, on his father's return to Ghana and Liberia. It sought to record his father's long-cherished return home, and discern what this meant to him. It was a wonderful project from the soul, a celebration of family, but also an interesting documentary with a wider message about migration and return, roots and diaspora, home and transnationalism. The premier in Ghana was a most moving experience, he smiled. Despite his fears that the film betrayed a European sensibility, it was accepted, totally and proudly. His wife and son were with him and the Ghanaians warmly welcomed and embraced them. The film was also screened in Italy (Milan), Spain (Tenerife), the Netherlands (Amsterdam), and at the Berlinale.

The following year he made a short documentary, 16 minutes in length, *You are Welcome*, on migration from Ghana to Germany in which he sought to disabuse people of the seductions of migration to Europe, and highlight the ugly underbelly of German immigration policy and the cynical and ruthless efforts to build camps in Morocco and return would-be immigrants from there before they cross into Spain and European Union space. It was screened at the Berlinale in 2007.

He is now working on his debut feature film, *Hedge Hog House*, about a 70-year-old Afro-German who has never been to Africa and never reflected much on his roots until an African asylum-seeker comes to stay with him. He produces his films through his company called "Our Productions" and calls himself Germany's most successful "No Budget Film Maker"! His feature film will be finished in a few weeks.

I could have gone on talking to him, but I felt I had already taken too much of his time and we said bye to each other with a firm handshake. At the door, he asked if we could click our fingers as they do in West Africa. His wife came out of the kitchen and bade me farewell and I made my way back to the train and the hotel. As Otu said, I noticed more black people on the train and on the streets. Several had stopped me yesterday on my way from Checkpoint Charlie, one to ask for directions in German, and another to ask if I was from Ghana. Then there was the young woman whom I asked for directions this morning, as I was coming to meet Otu, who shook her head with incomprehension of my English.

I didn't stay long at the hotel before heading to the Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus, the city's largest bookstore where Dr. Paulette Reed-Anderson had suggested we meet at 3:15 p.m. I had walked past it yesterday so I knew it wasn't too far from the hotel and I decided to walk. I got there a few minutes before the appointment and waited for Dr. Reed-Anderson at the coffee shop at the back of the bookstore. A few minutes later, she walked in—a middle-aged woman, brown in complexion, and wearing short hair. She suggested that before we sat for the interview she would take me on a tour of the area, to walk in the footsteps of people of African descent who had lived and worked in this monarchical enclave of the city. We walked for almost half an hour as she pointed to the old residences and buildings that belonged to the German monarchy; the street named after Africans, Moorstrasse; the old colonial buildings; the walkways where African-American scholars and activists, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Mary Church Terrell, and African-language instructors at Humboldt University must have walked; the opera house where Marian Anderson performed; and the plaza where the Nazis held a book-burning orgy.

Dr. Reed-Anderson explained the width of the streets and the architecture and the memorials. We went through the imposing main building of Humboldt University, through the back where students were huddled with their books or resting all over the square. We walked along Dorotheen Strasse to the faculty where Du Bois studied, and to the Friedrichstrasse Station where African-American musicians arrived in the 1920s and 1930s. She pointed to the various buildings under renovation, including the library, and commented on the lack of maintenance during the GDR (German Democratic Republic) period. Clearly, she had done this tour before and seemed immensely proud of her knowledge of African diasporan history in Berlin. I knew then I would be getting a long lecture. "How much time do you have," she asked when we got back to the café. "All the time you can spare," I responded, eager to learn more about her and Afro-German History.

She first came to Germany from the United States in 1983. She hinted that she had come with someone, a German man I suspected, who left. Life continues under such circumstances, she said cryptically. Reed-Anderson stressed that she came out of a strong interest to study in Germany, inspired by the fact that Du Bois had studied and lived here in the 1890s. Moreover, a foreign country offers one an opportunity to re-invent oneself, to do things one is not able to do in one's own country. Specifically, she looked forward to working as a historian.

She received her BA in History at San Jose State University in 1976. After graduating, she worked for a trade union in San Francisco. When she came to Germany, she also worked for a trade union. And it was the trade union founder, Hans-Boehler, who gave her a scholarship to study for an MA at the Technical University of Berlin between 1987 and 1993. The Humanities faculty at the university was small and the classes she took in

History and English Literature were so small that they were held in the professor's office. Her history dissertation, written in German, explored why Europeans were able to colonize Africa; while for her literature she wrote on Shakespeare's historical plays. She was elected as the student rep to the Selection Committee, which is comprised of students, professors, and foundation representatives and is responsible for vetting entrance applications. Some of the committee's meetings were held in West Germany. Later she enrolled in a PhD program at Humboldt University.

After completing her MA, she not only wanted to continue her studies, she also wanted to give what she was doing an analytical and institutional framework. That's when she decided to set up the Center for African Diaspora Research in Germany. She explained that in Germany, centers are independent bodies, while institutes have to be connected to a university. The Center is her own outfit. I got the distinct feeling that it is operated out of her home, or did not have premises as such, for last night when I suggested I could come by the Center she said it would be best to meet at the Dussmann, the building where she worked was being renovated; she did not say the Center.

The Center has collected a documentary and photographic archive on Afro-German history going back to the seventeenth century beginning with the Prussian slave trade. Reed-Anderson's own main area of research interest in German social and economic history focuses on the colonial period, 1871–1945. She explained that the German colonial office continued to exist even after Germany lost her colonies at the end of World War I. The office was responsible for regulating the compensation and revitalizing companies that had operated in the colonies, most of which were up and running by 1925 and regulating the compensation of colonial soldiers. She told the story of one East African soldier who came in the 1920s looking for his pay, which was paid in bits and pieces until his death during the Nazi era. African soldiers from the former German colonies were never fully compensated because the German government was reluctant to subsidize the British who had taken over their East African colony where the money would be spent. The restructured colonial office was also responsible for regulating relations with the victorious European powers that had taken over the German colonies.

The Center seeks to develop a new paradigm for understanding Afro-German history in the context of German history. It seeks to develop new methodologies and approaches away from conventional preoccupations with biographical accounts that are often disconnected from German history as a whole. As far as she is concerned, Afro-German history is an integral part of German history.

Reed-Anderson traced the key moments in the development of Afro-German history and the historiographical challenges of reconstructing this history, especially for the earlier periods. The first group of Afro-Germans, she maintained, consisted of enslaved Africans who came during the Atlantic slave trade era carried out by Prussian slave merchants. Unlike the Americas, the slaves worked in homes. It is not clear what happened to the descendants of the slaves. She spent a long time talking about the need for a thorough examination of the German slave records which are abundant and well kept. Many of the documents are in Dutch, the language of the Prussian monarchs. She lamented the fact that no one really wants to work on German slavery, certainly not German historians. Working on these records needs multiple language skills including Dutch and Spanish, the language of the *asientos* (Spanish and Portuguese "permissions") which governed much of the commercial transactions of the Atlantic slave trade. The records are very clear; they use precise language on the true motivations and context of the slave trade.

There is need for a major research project, perhaps on the scale of the UNESCO Slave Routes project. Such a project would need to involve scholars from Africa, Latin America, and Europe. The role of black scholars is particularly crucial; there are still few black scholars in these countries working on slavery. Such scholars are likely to bring different perspectives, new questions and interpretations. The importance of the slave trade for Germany cannot be doubted. The first German stock company—which had German, Dutch and English shareholders—sold stocks in African slaves. This trade was very profitable. Reading the Report on the Council of the Indies, founded from Columbus' time until the 1830s, makes it abundantly clear that economic profit drove the Atlantic slave trade for 400 years. The report is devoid of moral language beloved by some apologists of the slave trade.

During the same period, it became common practice in aristocratic circles to bring African children into their households. The literature shows these children as members of the households until they became teenagers, when traces of them are lost. There is probably a lot buried in aristocratic and church records that needs to be explored more systematically. This would require a lot of resources. The German academic practice in which professors get by with picking an exotic topic, publishing on it, and refraining from looking at it again or training their students to look at it prevents the growth of cumulative scholarship. This has been particularly detrimental to the grossly under-researched area of Afro-German history. Not only are there few, if any, Afro-German historians and scholars, it was not until very recently that the field of African diaspora history was discovered. The field has been monopolized by white German scholars. She dated the beginning of the field to 1989, when scholars in East Germany found themselves losing jobs and seeking survival by looking into fields popular elsewhere such as diaspora studies. This white monopoly was evident at the 2004 conference on the African diaspora in Europe held at Humboldt University at which African descendants were excluded and conspicuously absent among the presenters.

When Reed-Anderson started the Center, she began painstakingly collecting photographs of Afro-Germans from archives, especially from illustrated magazines. This was before German historians were interested in photographs as historical sources, she said. The Center also began collecting isolated works on slavery and establishing a firm basis for more research on Afro-German history.

The second period, 1810–1870, is less clear than the earlier period as far as Afro-German history is concerned. Few African-descended people seem to have come to Germany. Colonization ushered in a new period. There was a trickle of African students, workers, and entertainers. In the early colonial period, there were more workers and entertainers than students because Germany didn't believe in training Africans in universities, in creating an educated elite. Thus, in Germany, an Afro-German intellectual elite developed much later than in Britain and France, which had grave consequences for the development and articulation of an Afro-German identity. In fact, it was not until the 1980s, she maintained, that such an intellectual class started developing.

During the Nazi era, the relatively small Afro-German population was further reduced and traumatized. They sought to survive by becoming even more invisible. Many, an estimated 2,000, perished in concentration camps, others were stripped of their citizenship and deported; some fled. After World War II, the community began the slow, painful road to recovery. The formation of the two Germanys and African decolonization opened a new era of African migration. The GDR invited and attracted African students as part

of its drive to win international recognition. West Germany was importing labor to rebuild its economy. Despite restrictions and isolation in the GDR, and racism in West Germany, the African students contributed to the growth of the Afro-German population by staying after their studies or marrying and producing biracial children with German women.

In the meantime, African-American troops stationed in West Germany and West Berlin contributed to the growth of the Afro-German community through their offspring with German women. The role and entry of black troops, both African and African American, went back to the First World War and the interwar period. Also, the pre-war era saw the settlement or periodic visits by African-American entertainers. The numbers of these entertainers grew after the Second World War.

The numbers of foreigners from Africa registered in West Berlin jumped from 62 in 1954 to 519 in 1964; 3,999 in 1973; 6,500 in 1988; and 13,252 in 1996 in the reunified city, and 15,016 in 1999. The GDR began importing guest workers from Algeria, Angola, Libya, and Mozambique in 1979. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and demise of the GDR, many of the guest workers repatriated en masse.

All along, African immigration to Germany was dominated by males. Many of them entered into marriages of convenience with white German women. The children from such unions not only tended to adopt their mothers' lower-class positions, but they also lacked a black consciousness and grew up just wanting to be German. The women who accompanied their husbands to Africa often suffered cultural shock and were neglected or abandoned and would often return to Germany with their children. The class discrepancies and the problems of socialization varied for African women married to German men. Such women were able to impart their African culture to their offspring. Increasingly, Afro-Germans have been marrying each other.

Relations between the different groups of African-descended people are sometimes conflictual. Afro-Germans raised by single white mothers often have different attitudes from those raised in households with both parents, including their black fathers. Also, class expectations tend to vary. As recent African immigrants adopt citizenship, they are becoming increasingly demanding of opportunity. Many are setting up businesses.

Relations between African Americans and Afro-Germans are mediated by the larger relationship between the U.S. and Germany. African-American cultural influences have been strong among Afro-Germans. Many of the African-American musicians and entertainers who came after the Second World War were from Jim Crow America and often had an exaggerated sense of freedom in Germany. The U.S. military presence put a particular inflection on the African-American population in Germany. Many were from working class backgrounds, many went back, and those that remained are getting up in age. While some individuals stand out, they have little of the intellectual presence of Du Bois, Terrell, and Locke, even if collectively they contributed to Germany for helping secure the peace. Reed-Anderson felt there were not enough exchanges between black scholars in the U.S. and Germany, between African-American studies departments and German universities. We agreed we should try to keep in touch to build such linkages. We even thought it would be desirable to organize a conference on the Afro-German diaspora, or Afro-European diaspora more broadly, which would be run by black scholars on both sides of the Atlantic.

Three and a quarter hours later we left the cafe and went in our respective directions. She gave me a copy of a booklet she had written, *Reuniting the Footsteps: Berlin and the African Diaspora*, and a copy of her CV, while I gave her copies of our department's and college's newsletters.

I was famished. I have been deliberately eating two meals a day, breakfast in the hotel restaurants—if for no better reason than that it is included in the bill—and dinner. I stopped by an outdoor Indian restaurant, which was sparsely occupied, and ordered myself a fish curry and salad served with rice and a mango juice to drink. The server was a black woman in her early twenties. She seemed friendly but not too keen to strike up a conversation. I didn't mind. Besides enjoying the delicious food, I was trying to sort out what I had heard from Otu and Paulette. A productive day indeed!

June 25, 2008

It started as a wasteful day and ended with a pleasant surprise. Ani Ekpenyong had promised to send me an e-mail with an address of where we could meet. She never did. I felt like a hostage waiting, checking every flash on the Blackberry. To kill time I watched Otu's two documentaries that he had given me, *Papa Africa* and *You are Welcome*. Both were competently done, but I had expected more from them. *Papa Africa* is a touching account of his father's return to Ghana and reunion with his brother. It is emotionally gripping in parts, but it leaves one hungry for more insight into the pain and pleasure of exile, of migration, of the diaspora condition. The love of the son for the father is unmistakable, and that is the film's most endearing quality: the camera embraces the father as he arrives at Accra airport, wakes up in his brother's house, talks to his brother, and engages in chores of daily life and family conversation with a respectful, loving intimacy. *You are Welcome* mainly focuses on two people speaking to the camera, interspersed with jarring images and pleading reggae music, of African refugees and migrants trying to make it to Europe, of their abuses, and of Africans' defiant humanity. The young man captures the yearning for Europe, for education, and material betterment, but he also affirms the vivaciousness of Africa, its emotional and climatic warmth; qualities that a young white German student or worker—it is not too clear who she really is—discovers and embraces and struggles with. The film clearly seeks to deconstruct Europe as paradise, and Africa as hell that fuels the desperate migrations to Europe, but it also hints at the common humanity, at the possibilities for respectful conversations and human connectedness beneath the yawning gaps in development between the two continents. It is a tad bit willful, romantic even, and I was left yearning for more. Perhaps that is a sign of its power.

I also read Paulette's booklet, *Reuniting the Footsteps*. It provides a useful compendium of the key dates and moments and even primary textual and photographic materials on Afro-German history from the seventeenth century to the end of the twentieth century. It even offers an index of the names of some Afro-Germans who left their mark, mostly in the first half of the twentieth century, including the African language lecturers who were brought to Humboldt University's Institute for Oriental Languages. As we walked yesterday, she told me quite a bit about the lecturers, their contributions, their poor treatment and low pay, and their struggles for justice. They even took the university to court for higher pay. They were in the employ of the university but their pay was provided by the colonial office. But the booklet provides little analysis. I looked in vain for insight and information on the growth of the Afro-German community, its identity and cultural institutions and practices, its organizations and struggles, its successes and failures. There are tantalizing hints, even in such throwaway calendar listings as the date when Black History Month started to be celebrated—1990—that cry out for explanation, elaboration, and context.

As I read the booklet, I realized our conversation yesterday had followed its structure and language, save for of course the historiographical commentaries. Nonetheless, the booklet reinforced my broad understanding of the key moments in the development of Afro-German history I am beginning to develop.

Having not heard from Ekpenyong, finished watching Otu's films, and read Paulette's booklet, I became restless and tried to contact other people I had been trying to reach all weekend and arrange interviews. I even toyed with the idea of going to Munich to meet with contacts there including Tahir Della, one of the key leaders of the Afro-German community. I decided to give myself until tomorrow morning to finalize the new plans.

I was sitting by the computer in the lobby, checking and sending e-mails, when I suddenly spotted someone familiar trudging in with luggage. It was Chika Okeke-Agulu from Penn State. I had last seen him two years ago before leaving Penn State and "Unhappy Valley." "Chika!" I shouted his name. He turned and was shocked to see me, saying "Professor Zeleza!" I quickly finished the e-mail I was working on, a statement from the Head of Department for the departmental newsletter for Trina. He joined me in the bar after putting away his luggage in his room. I congratulated him on his job offer at Princeton, about which I had heard from Valerie Smith, the head of African Studies at Princeton, when we were both on an evaluation team for Africana Studies at Brown University a couple of months ago. He was clearly excited and proud of his early entry into the Ivy League, the pinnacle of American higher education. The alignment of the stars was clearly in his favor, he enthused, for the same week that he got the Princeton offer he also received an offer from Williams College where he was spending the year on a fellowship. He recounted the joyful details of the negotiations with the two schools, the reaction from Penn State, and his eventual decision to take the Princeton offer.

We talked about the changing fortunes of African scholars in the American academy, the continuing and often ugly struggles with Africanists and other white gatekeepers, the seductions and sanctions of American academic capitalism, and the responsibilities of the African academic diaspora toward African intellectual development. I noticed several of the people in the bar casting stolen glances in our direction periodically, probably wondering why these two Africans seemed so animated, sounded so excited. He explained he had come to give a lecture at the Free University and to participate in planning for a project sponsored by the President of the Federal Republic, which would involve African art exhibits in all of Berlin's five major museums. The project would involve bringing prominent African artists to curate the exhibits and showcase the best of contemporary African art. He had actually been planning to write me to ask if I could contribute an historical essay on the African-European encounter since the Berlin Conference for the book that would accompany the exhibitions. I thought it would be a worthwhile endeavor and briefed him on my research and insisted on the need to involve Afro-Germans. I promised to give him contacts.

He left for an official reception and I went for dinner nearby. We reconnected later in the evening. The bar was full of hotel guests watching the charged European Cup semi-final game between Germany and Turkey so we sat elsewhere in the lobby. Occasionally, we would hear rapturous screams from the bar, a sign, we concluded, of goals. Given the history and size of the Turkish minority in Germany, this game was not simply a game with another country, but a struggle over national identity and loyalty, a test for the Turkish minority's German citizenship.

We resumed the conversation from where we had left it earlier. Chika regaled me with the story of battles to control the exhibitions and representations of African art when I

asked if he would write regular blogs on the subject for *The Zeleza Post*, specifically the saga involving a Yale scholar and would-be arbiter of African art, and Salah Hassan, the well-know art historian at Cornell and a mutual friend, and another prominent African art scholar over the African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. It was a gripping story in which the usurper of African art was left with egg on his face. He agreed that I could publish his blog on the Biennale on my website. I need to broaden the range of commentary on the website to include specialists on African art, sports, fashion, and other important subjects, including the economy and science and technology besides the usual political stuff.

June 26, 2008

I was awoken around 6:00 a.m. by a call from John Long. He was probably jet-lagged and anxious to see how I was doing. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get back to sleep. Watching the news was depressing, as usual; more African leaders were now condemning Mugabe, so that was gratifying, although too little, too late.

I had breakfast with Chika who left for the airport immediately afterward. John was supposed to come at 10:00 a.m., but he didn't turn up until an hour later. He had been lost, he said. I was glad to see him and thanked him for the German contacts he had given me and advice to stay in Central Berlin. He kindly offered to show me around. After walking to several wrong places, we finally were able to board a train to downtown. We got off at the *Hackescher Markt* and walked through the gentrified Jewish district with its outdoor stalls of fresh food and restaurants, then past the radio tower and red brick city tower to the massive Alexander Plaza with its department stores, the Park Inn Hotel, the tallest building in the city, an open square, and train stations, shops, and fast food restaurants. He even took me into one of the department stores. All along, he explained his knowledge and impressions and how he came to like Germany.

I learned that his current wife was a school teacher of German and he once came to Germany on a Fulbright Scholarship. He frequently comes with his wife, spending varied amounts of time. Now that he is retired from UIC, he spends even more time here and is planning on coming back soon for a three-month stay to continue working on his book on African-American expatriates. He called one of his African friends to whom he wanted me to talk and with whom we agreed to meet at 1:30 p.m. To while away the time he suggested we take the train from Friedrichstrasse to Humboldt University. At the university, we went to the Institute of English and American Studies where he noticed several of the professors he had met during his Fulbright were still teaching. He knocked on the door of one but she was not there. There was the small glass poster of W.E.B. Du Bois, in whose name a lecture series was organized. Yesterday Professor Hortense Spillers had given a lecture on black identities. She was from Vanderbilt University but had been at Cornell previously. We both wished we had known about it and so we could have attended.

We walked back to Alexander Plaza to meet with Idowu Eleka Imoudu. We were half an hour late. He greeted us cheerfully, a short man with graying and thinning hair. We sat by one of the fast food restaurants and began a conversation that lasted nearly three hours. I explained to Imoudu the scope of my project and some of the issues I wanted his views on. An energetic and passionate man, he is the son of the legendary Nigerian trade unionist, Imoudu. He first came to Germany at the age of 16 in 1962 through his father's connections with the trade union movement in the GDR. He completed his

secondary education here and then his Bachelor's degree, after which he hoped to return to Nigeria and join the army. Unfortunately, the Nigerian civil war broke out and he was unable to return for several years. When he did, he didn't stay long before he got a scholarship to study for a PhD. At the time, many Nigerians preferred Britain or West Germany, but since he had already been in the GDR, he had no problem accepting the scholarship. He talked of his father's radicalism and incorruptibility with admiration, leavened by mock criticism that this cost him money. He recalled his father's refusal to accept favors or bribes from companies, his criticizing the Soviet Union in front of the Chinese embassy in the GDR at a time when the Sino-Soviet split was widening, which was not the polite thing to do in the GDR against one of the USSR's staunchest allies.

A fast speaker with an unmistakable Nigerian accent, notwithstanding nearly 46 years of residence in Germany, he wandered off easily and I had to frequently prompt him back to my line of inquiry, often assisted by subtle interventions from John. He spoke of Africa and Africans in Germany with the deep exasperation of a frustrated, long-term immigrant, an exile with a frozen pathological view of his continent's and fellow Africans' capacities and prospects. A part of me felt sorry for him, for underneath the bluster was personal anguish, the regrets of unfulfilled dreams. He talked of his business ambitions, but the only concrete thing he was doing was a research job that did not seem to pay much that he had secured recently. He had expansive plans to extend his business to the Czech Republic because opportunities in the new former socialist countries were better than in Germany, with its sluggish economy.

As fascinating as his business plans and ambitions were, I was more interested in his views of the Afro-German experience. I probed him on the composition and relationships among people of African descent in Germany. He repeated much of what I had already heard, that the community consists of Afro-Germans who are mostly mixed, offspring of black fathers and white mothers, and African immigrants and African Americans whose numbers are relatively small. Africans and African Americans do not get along too well because of mutually held negative stereotypes of each other. Among Africans there are divisions of language, especially between those from English and French speaking countries; while the latter often learn English, this was not reciprocated by the former. Traditionally, there were also differences between those who came as students and those who came as refugees, those who came from bilateral agreements between the GDR and African socialist governments such as Mozambique and Angola, who even had their own school, and those who came as individuals to West Germany. Overall, the numbers of those coming as students have declined sharply, particularly from the English-speaking countries that were courted by scholarships from the GDR. His father, for example, had played a critical role in the development of a scholarship program for Nigerian students to study in the GDR. Now most of the African students studying in Germany seem to come from the former German colonies of Togo and Cameroon.

Relations between African immigrants and Afro-Germans, who he insisted are mostly mixed race, are relatively good. The problem is that Afro-Germans suffer from acute identity problems largely because they are raised by their white mothers and are not adequately exposed to the African cultures of their fathers, who are often absent from their lives, like Obama, he added. Moreover, media representations of Africa are so negative that there is little incentive for them to identify with African culture. He saw that in his own son, whom he never raised, born out of a casual relationship with a German woman.

We spent a considerable amount of time discussing organizations within the broad Afro-German community, including those of African immigrants. He tended to focus

on the African migrants and vented his disappointment with their lack of a cooperative spirit; insufferable individualism and inability to work together; petty jealousies and ambitions for each to be the big chief; lack of resources, especially money, to build proper organizations and an infrastructure for business that would enable them to make money. He conceded that conditions in Germany often did not allow them to succeed, a subject we returned to later.

John urged him to discuss the Pan-African Forum, which he had co-founded with a Malawian activist, Mahoma, who is since deceased. The Forum was founded in 1997. He launched into another diatribe against Africans, how difficult they are to organize, their preoccupation with personal material interests, their unwillingness to sacrifice, and even their susceptibility to working with the secret police. It took gentle prodding to get him to discuss the Forum. He and Mahoma had been influenced by an African-American activist, Donald Griffin, who formed a colloquium that sought to promote the interests of the Afro-German community. But Griffin ran the colloquium as a personal and family outfit, so Mahoma and Imoudu decided to break away and form their own organization, which they originally wanted to call the Pan-African Colloquium before they settled on the name Pan-African Forum. The Forum sought to bring the different African-descended groups together, to create an infrastructure for blacks.

The Pan-African Forum had several objectives: help organize black businesses and improve prospects and performance by sharing information, experiences, and resources; create a cultural center for African-descended people to come together as the Turkish community has been able to achieve; and provide educational assistance to the youth who are often marginalized in the educational system and find it hard to go beyond the first two years of university education; provide a forum to educate the community and the wider German society about African issues through seminars, symposia, activities, and celebrations connected to African events including Africa Day; provide assistance, including social welfare and legal assistance, to members of the community who are facing difficulties. He explicitly stated the Forum had no political objectives, as such. Also, it sought to target Afro-German kids who often suffer from having no links to their African fathers and who constitute a crucial bridge between Africa and Germany and in whose interest it is for Africa to develop.

Working with Afro-German youths is difficult, he said. The lack of successful black institutions and businesses deprives them of positive role models, the demonstrated effects of what is possible. He was happy to note that Afro-Germans were becoming more conscious of their African or black identity, and the possibilities of using their position to benefit both themselves and Africa. Obama's candidacy was having an electrifying impact on Afro-German youth and Nkrumah's dream of Pan-Africanism was being rekindled. At this point, he went into a long discourse on Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, what Nkrumah had taught African Americans, and the importance of Obama's lack of slave ancestry, before we got him back to the Forum. The Forum had been moribund since 2005 following Mahoma's death.

He was trying to raise money to revive it. In fact, he claimed it had been sustained all along through his personal funds. That was why he thought it was essential for the Forum to have a firm financial base by running businesses such as restaurants. Others have attacked Imoudu for trying to turn the Forum into a business, but such people are misguided, he insisted. As part of his drive to revive the Forum, he shared his dream of convening what he called the Second Berlin Conference, to which governments from

Africa and the fifteen signatories to the original Berlin Conference, as well as civil society organizations from both Africa and the western countries, would be invited to discuss the impact and wrongs of colonialism and postcolonial misrule, and to devise a Marshall Plan for Africa. I had to restrain myself from laughing.

More fruitful were his observations on occupational and opportunity structures for African immigrants and Afro-Germans. He noted that most Africans work in low skilled service jobs or they run their own businesses, many of which are petty or informal or even underground businesses. Very few are in professional jobs because these require acquisition of German citizenship. Because of the difficulties African immigrants face in the German labor market, and tough economic conditions, many are migrating to other European countries where prospects are better, such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. He repeated his intentions to expand his business to Prague. Afro-Germans have better opportunities because of their citizenship rights. But historically, those in West Germany were excluded from university, while those educated in East German universities, where prospects were better, found their qualifications devalued following unification.

Many young Afro-Germans either work in menial jobs or indulge in "gangsterism" and criminal activities. The lucky ones are mainly employed or pin their hopes in the cultural and entertainment industries, including modeling and music. John commented on the African Americans whose occupational roles run the gamut from those working for the government to entrepreneurs and entertainers. Those working for the government are associated with the American government and they include service personnel concentrated around Frankfurt. The entrepreneurs have established a niche for themselves in the film industry, grant writing, and such activities that exploit their connections to the United States. The entertainers include musicians and dancers. The less well-to-do tend to be the African Americans married to German women. I found this intriguing but had no chance to pursue it as Imoudu interrupted and went off topic.

I was curious about gender relations from Imoudu's point of view. He observed that many African immigrants are married to German women for opportunistic reasons, for "the green card," as they say in the U.S., while German men marrying African women, whom they meet abroad, often do so for love, or as they say in the U.S. because of "jungle fever," lust for the black body. Many African men marry German women while they already have wives at home, which their German wives, when they do know, don't seem to mind as long as the men are living with them in Germany and providing sexual services. In fact, the syndrome of African men being taken care of by German women is quite common. John chimed in that you often see these buffed-up brothers, looking as if they spend all of their time at the gym, walking beside their busty white women. Afro-Germans usually do not like to marry Africans. Many prefer to marry whites, although intermarriages among Afro-Germans are growing.

In terms of cultural expression, African-American influences are quite strong among Afro-German youth. In fact, this reinforces the preoccupation with entertainment, and especially music, as a gateway to success. Hip hop is seen as a stepping-stone toward success in the U.S., followed by a successful return to Germany. It also provides children of African-American fathers a special pride and they are quick to distinguish themselves from children of African fathers. Part of these kids' strong sense of connection to the United States is the fact that many are able to go back and forth between the two countries. The importance of such connections can be seen even among children of African fathers; those who not only grew up with their fathers in Germany but are able to live periodically

in their fathers' countries of origin have different cultural attitudes from those brought up solely by their white mothers.

Also, attitudes among Afro-Germans are affected by the range of contacts and connections to, or experiences with countries that have much larger African-descended populations, such as Britain. Without such contacts, either with Africa or other parts of the diaspora, there are strong pressures for Afro-Germans to see themselves as German. This is partly driven by the fact that German society keeps telling them they are African as a way of marginalizing and excluding them from German culture and society, while at the same time, Africa is denigrated and not a source of positive identity. This creates a strong imperative for Afro-Germans to distance themselves from Africa and Africans, to affirm their Germanness and regard other African-descended peoples as the Other, as foreigners. But if they have to seek cultural solidarity, then it is commonly with blacks in other developed countries—especially the United States, the world's superpower—that boast a culturally vibrant black community. During the U.S. civil rights movement, the Afro-German community gravitated to leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, a pull that finds renewed expression in the empowering fascination with Obama.

By and large, Afro-Germans rarely visit Africa unless they are raised by their fathers together with their mothers. Imoudu discussed the poignant story of a young Afro-German woman he met in a club. She told him she had a Nigerian father who had abandoned her when she was young. She was pleasantly surprised when he told her he knew the father and that he would soon be going to Nigeria where he would most likely meet him. In passing, he asked her why Afro-German youngsters like her tended to avoid befriending other Afro-Germans. The young woman defended herself by saying she had Afro-German friends. She mentioned one she met recently with whom she bonded. Imoudu traveled to Nigeria with a letter from the young woman to her father. When the father read the letter, he wept, regretting the abandonment of his daughter. He gave Imoudu a letter to his daughter, together with a picture of another daughter he had abandoned. When Imoudu gave the young woman the letter, she screamed when she saw the picture. It was that of the friend she had met recently.

African migrants maintain contact with the continent through frequent or periodic visits as well as by sending remittances. Imoudu stressed that Nigerians in Europe send more money to Nigeria than all foreign aid combined. I asked about the level of their political engagement. He said there wasn't much, which is why the Pan-African Forum had tried to raise political awareness about African issues. In return, he believed African countries could help the diaspora as well. While the barriers could not be underestimated, several opportunities and possibilities could be explored. First, African banks could establish themselves actively in the diaspora and help finance diaspora businesses and mobilize diaspora capital. Second, African governments, through their embassies could put pressure on German companies operating and making huge projects in their countries to invest in the diaspora community through educational funding and employment opportunities. Third, African governments and businesses could utilize the diaspora more effectively through circulation of their skills, directly or through western companies that operate in their countries.

We concluded our conversation by discussing the obstacles that face the Afro-German community, especially the issue of racism. While some responded by leaving the country, I was curious to learn of other responses that did not involve such drastic measures. He mentioned a range of organizations and initiatives, both generated within the community and sponsored by external sympathizers, to fight against racism and discrimination against

Afro-Germans and immigrants. Many Afro-Germans, he argued, don't think that the anti-discrimination and human rights organizations help much. He believes there is a need to strengthen Afro-German organizations and promote dialogue with right wing parties and fascist youth, from the NDP and other similar formations, to deliberate and discuss racism, the factors behind it, and ways to get rid of it. I tried hard to suppress my incredulity at his faith in dialogue, especially as his idea of strengthening these organizations was tied to his dream of establishing viable businesses. But I had to be thankful for a stimulating conversation that raised as many questions as it provided answers to intriguing issues about the history, development, and prospects of the African diaspora in Germany.

John and Imoudu walked me to my train back to the hotel. I had no urge to walk to a restaurant outside the hotel after all the walking I had done. So I went to the restaurant in the hotel, which was empty. The overly eager waiter and delicious food more than made up for the eerie quietness.

June 27, 2008

I finally met Ani Ekpenyong at the Dussmann in the same restaurant I had met Paulette. I was already sitting when she texted to say she was in the front of the bookstore. She walked in with a broad smile and apologized for holding me up the other day. Slightly taller than me and edging toward heaviness, she had short hair and wore jeans. I ordered coffee and she ordered herbal tea. She had an hour, she said.

I told her I was interested in getting her views on the history and development of the Afro-German community, its identities and organization, interactions and occupational and educational profiles, linkages with Africa and other diasporas, and its gender dynamics. Unlike the others I had talked to thus far, she interspaced her personal views with references to the scholarly literature.

For the historical part, she suggested six crucial texts and authors who would provide me with a comprehensive overview. She noted that the Afro-German community is comprised of different groups who historically developed different identities and approaches to exercising and actualizing those identities. For a long time, the identity of Afro-Germans was largely confined to the mixed race population; excluding Africans from the continent who mostly came as students and others from the diaspora, such as African Americans who mostly came as servicemen and had settled in Germany. Now, the term is more encompassing, it includes all those people of African descent. Certainly, that's how she and her colleagues who are active in the Afro-German movement define the community. This broader, more Afrocentric conception took time to develop and it is still resisted in some quarters. It was facilitated by the development of the Afro-German movement from the mid-1980s. Before discussing the movement, I asked her about the place of North Africans in the community. She noted that North Africans were sometimes identified as Afro-Germans, but some preferred to pass as white, which is especially possible for the children of North African Arabs or Berbers married to German whites.

The development of the Afro-German movement in the mid-1980s was spearheaded by women and facilitated by the rise of the feminist and gay movements. The role of Audre Lorde, the African-American gay activist icon, was crucial. She spent time teaching in Berlin and encouraged Afro-German women, including lesbians, to organize themselves

and work together. Like their male counterparts, Afro-German women were isolated from each other. This was particularly the case in small towns and rural communities where they were confronted with the debilitation of racism on a constant basis. Racism is deeply rooted in German society and intellectual history. Until recently, Germany did not see itself as a country where immigrants could become Germans. Germanness was always connected to whiteness, which excluded Afro-Germans and other Germans of color who at one time were considered black—similar to Britain's history of calling people of African and Asian descent *black*, and actively discouraged African and diasporan Africans from settling. In intellectual arenas, though, key German thinkers from Kant to Hegel had sanctified the Eurocentric and racist episteme of the Enlightenment that denigrated and devalued black humanity. It is only now that these thinkers are being deconstructed through the critical lenses of diaspora studies and postcolonial studies.

The isolation of Afro-Germans was accentuated by their lack of spatial concentration and generational depth. Unlike other parts of the diaspora, Afro-Germans were scattered all over the country and few went back over several generations as Afro-German families. It was in this context that Afro-German activists saw the need to mobilize, as well as create spaces where they could come together and reinforce each other, renegotiate their place in German society, to live more fully in this country as Germans without denying their African ancestry and identity.

A group of Afro-German women inspired by Audre Lorde decided to publish a collection of their experiences, a book that was accepted by the publishing house where Ekpenyong works. The book, *Showing Our Colors*, became a landmark text, a demonstration of the power of intellectual activists and intellectual interventions to mediate the formation of social identities and movements. Before the publication of this pivotal text, Afro-German women had started recognizing each other, organizing their conversations in various forums, including in a magazine they established. Audre Lorde wrote a forward to the famous book.

Soon after, men joined the burgeoning movement of Afro-German self-affirmation and struggle. The Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD Black German Initiative), an association of black Germans, was formed. Also formed was Afrodeutsche Frauen (ADEFA, Afro-German Women). A whole range of smaller and narrowly focused organizations also began to emerge—for different African groups, refugees, students, etc. Still, no umbrella organization exists that can speak for the Afro-German community. Efforts have been made, but the difficulties have proved immense. An attempt was made, for example, to form the African Council that would bring African and Afro-German groups together. It was frustrated by infighting, especially among men struggling for positions and power. Also, there were disagreements on who constitutes the Afro-German community and whether whites can be allowed to play a role, that is, white sympathizers or white parents of Afro-Germans. As many Afro-German activists have adopted an Afrocentric perspective, this has become a serious issue. They believe it is important to create a separate, safe space for black people where they can discuss and strategize. Another challenge centers on prejudices over gender and sexuality, such as homophobic attitudes that are prevalent in the community and among some of the activists. But these problems can be overcome. In fact, people are not as rigid on many of the issues as they might appear. The fact that the Afro-German community is relatively small makes the fights less lethal and damaging in the long run.

She talked considerably on education and the obstacles Afro-Germans have faced. Education in Germany is strongly correlated to class background so that working-class kids

have fewer chances of going to university. Migrants of color and Afro-Germans, despite their class backgrounds, tend to be considered working class. So they are subjected to the double jeopardy of class exclusion and racial marginalization. For example, Turkish children, many of whose families have been in Germany for generations, are often placed in special education classes, the assumption being that they are not smart enough to face the rigors of German education. The same fate befalls the offspring of African immigrants who might themselves be highly educated. For a long time, Afro-German women were forced into caring professions such as nursing. There are of course Afro-Germans who have made it in other professions, but their numbers are relatively small.

Within the universities, Afro-German students often confront racism. Those wishing to do African studies are frustrated by the whiteness of the field and many leave to pursue other fields such as education and gender studies. Criticisms against not only African studies but other fields as well are increasingly being made. German scholarship has yet to come to terms with the connections of colonialism and ethnography. It is important for these academic interventions to be made, for more Afro-Germans to enter universities to take up and destabilize those spaces. Collaborations with other diasporan scholarly communities are important. This can be achieved through conferences, joint research projects, distribution of publications, and other activities that require commitment of time and money. The formation of Black European Studies (BEST) is an important part of the process of creating their own intellectual spaces and agendas.

On the external linkages of the Afro-German community, she said much of what I had already heard: that Afro-Germans look for role models from the U.S., from civil rights leadership like Shakur, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, to Audre Lorde and Barack Obama. The U.S. black experience serves as a template, a benchmark to measure both successes and failures of the Afro-German community. Within Europe, Afro-Germans tend to look more toward linkages with the larger black communities in the United Kingdom and Holland—the latter includes Surinamese. France is not a major focus because of language: English is more dominant in Germany than French. From the other African diasporas in Europe, Afro-Germans seek to learn more about their experiences and establish networks. Africa does not attract much interest among Afro-Germans except those with an African parent who might go there to study or live for a while. African immigrants are of course active in African affairs, including politics. Those without or with absent parents often harbor negative stereotypes; all they learn about Africa is war, hunger and poverty—powerful stereotypes that take time to unlearn. The process of unlearning the negative stereotypes of Africa and their own identities require education—a different education than that provided in the schools. It is here where community-organized educational and cultural events are crucial. It is a pity that Black History Month, which flourished in the 1990s, has since died. It provided an opportunity to organize seminars and learn the history of Africa and the African diaspora. Currently an annual meeting of the black community is organized. It is more like a family reunion, but seminars are conducted and people are re-educated about the incorrect things they have learned about themselves and about Africa.

As we ended, I asked her about her own background. She was the daughter of a white German mother and a Nigerian father, a radiologist. She has lived in Nigeria twice, first at the age of four, then later when she was nine. When her father worked at the University of the West Indies, the family lived in Jamaica for a while. They left the island in 1981. He apparently didn't like it there; he didn't understand how slave descendants could feel superior to him; he felt superior to them. I commented on the highly racialized complexes

of superiority and inferiority among Africans and diasporan Africans. There were lots of Afro-Brazilians in Germany, among whom she observed eager aspirations to whiteness, she added. Germans seemed to love them for their lack of radical racial consciousness and overly sexualized representations as exotic bodies of samba.

I thanked her for her time and for sharing her thoughts and insights by giving her copies of the UIC departmental and college newsletters. We walked to the front of Dussmann where she was meeting a friend at 3:00 p.m. The woman turned out to be from Chicago, a short, tattooed, and heavy-set black woman. They kissed on the lips and when she was told I was from Chicago, the woman and I talked about the people we knew in common. She had been at the University of Chicago. "It's a small world," we both said. I asked Ekpenyong to let me know the next time she visited Chicago so we could arrange a lecture or seminar for her at UIC. She had told me earlier that she had recently been to Chicago, in March, visiting the relatives of her partner; she loved the city.

I walked back to the hotel enjoying the summer day, which had brightened up after a gloomy morning and showers a little earlier. This seems like such a walkable and livable city. Its buildings rarely seem to go beyond five or six floors, manageably human in their scale. The architecture of most European cities seems to lack the extravagant arrogance of the skyscrapers of New York, Chicago, and other ambitious major American cities.

I stayed in the hotel until almost 9:00 p.m. before going for dinner. I had eaten a lavish bowl of chicken soup at a café beside the Dussmann before the meeting with Ekpenyong, so I wasn't too hungry. More importantly, I had arranged for two more interviews, one with Mekonnen Mesqhana who worked in a government department dealing with citizenship issues. He was involved in and knowledgeable about the Afro-German community and had once organized a conference on German colonization, a rather sensitive subject that I should not raise with him, according to Paulette who had given me his name, because the conference was quite acrimonious. The second interview was with Tahir Della, a leader of the ISD with whom everybody I had talked to suggested I meet. When it became clear I could not go to Munich to meet him in person, we agreed to talk on the phone. By 9:00 p.m., neither had called, which was a rather disappointing end to the day and visit. My spirits were raised a little by the meal I ate at the Italian bistro several minutes' walk from the hotel, a delicious and filling dish of salmon pasta. When I got back, I found no message that my two interviewees had called. I can always contact them later, I consoled myself as I packed my luggage.

Britain

June 28, 2008

I am back to the old imperial metropole. As befitting a former colonial superpower's capital, London is a melting pot of peoples from everywhere, including Africa and the diaspora. The multicultural faces of modern Britain started at Heathrow, where the immigration officials were a blend of European, Asian, and African-descended people. I was greeted by a young Asian-looking immigration official who flipped through my passport without the inquisitive gaze one might expect from a dour white official, as I had experienced many times before. The fact that I handed her a Canadian passport didn't raise the slightest sign of surprise.

I left the hotel in Berlin at 9:30 a.m. after fortifying myself with breakfast. The restaurant was unusually packed; so was the lobby. A tour bus stood outside. The hotel staff, ever-so friendly, thanked me for staying at their hotel and wished me a safe flight and hoped I would come again. If one was to judge strictly by the warm demeanor of the staff in the hotel and restaurant, one would be hard pressed to understand that this land is deeply infected with racism which keeps Afro-Germans a marginalized, insecure community, and that it has wrought horrendous suffering and devastation on many people during two world wars, the Holocaust, and the neo-Nazis, and the failure to integrate the Turkish minority. As I took the Mercedes Benz taxi ride to the airport, it felt like I had been in Berlin much longer than a mere seven days. While I had not interviewed as many people as I had hoped to, I was content that I had deepened my grasp of Afro-German history, culture, activities, and struggles, which would aid immensely as I read the literature on the subject. In particular, I felt I had made some invaluable contacts that can only help widen my diaspora network of scholars and activists.

The 90-minute wait at the airport went by fast; so did the flight from Berlin to London, thanks to the magazines and newspapers I bought. The papers were bemoaning the continued escalation of oil prices. And there was the story about former President Mandela's 90th birthday bash in London last night. I had watched part of it on BBC. He is quite frail; Graca Machel, his wife, had to help him walk and she could be overheard telling him to wave to the crowds. But when he read from his brief prepared remarks, his voice boomed with the moral authority and charismatic power we have all come to expect from him. Yet I could not help being troubled by the very fact that this bash was taking place in London, the very capital that had sent forth the capitalists and colonists who had, with brazen historical arrogance and insatiable greed, appropriated for themselves the resources and destinies of African lands and peoples, including Mandela's own native South Africa. I was troubled by the sea of white faces, wildly cheering the aged icon of the liberation struggle as if desperately seeking absolution for their historic sins of slavery and colonialism and their persistent sins of racism and oppression of the African diaspora. And unwittingly or not, the great man was complicit in this charade. It was painful to watch, a sad reminder that the imperial sun had yet to set for the postcolonial world.

From Heathrow I took the underground, the Piccadilly Line, to Russell Square, which I had suspected was the closest stop to the hotel where I was staying—the Thistle Bloomsbury Hotel. Unfortunately, the Russell Square station was closed for repairs, so I got off at the next station, King's Cross, and took a taxi. It hit me how narrow London streets are and how expensive London is, for this rather short ride took forever due to traffic and cost £12. Thank God, I hadn't taken a taxi all the way from Heathrow, I said to myself, as I grudgingly paid the fare that would have cost one-quarter of that in Chicago.

The hotel is under renovation, so the entire front is covered with scaffolding and construction materials. They didn't, of course, say that on the hotel website. Inside, the hotel looked reasonably comfortable, with a homey lobby where I was served tea while waiting for my room to be ready. There are portraits all over the lobby and along the stairs to the various floors, replicas of the English powerful and mighty, mostly royals and other notables, all impeccably white. You would never know this country was built on empire. There are also, as I discovered later, paintings of the great castles that dot the pristine countryside, devoid of peasants and farmers.

The room was spacious and very clean; I was relieved, notwithstanding that the huge windows opened to the reconstruction scaffolding. Strangely, there were three twin beds and the fan was on, although it was not hot. I unpacked the luggage and went out to explore my new neighborhood. I walked toward the Centre Point building that stands at the intersection of Oxford and Tottenham streets. I walked along Oxford Street, the famous shopping lane, packed with shoppers and tourists of all colors, ages, and consumer tastes. It was striking how ordinary the street looks; it has none of the grandiosity of Fifth Avenue in New York or Michigan Avenue in Chicago. That indeed is the charm of London, the modesty of its buildings and streets rich in history, even if some of that history is quite hideous for our people.

When I got back to the hotel nearly an hour and half later, I got a call from Mpalive Msiska who I had texted earlier that I had arrived. He offered to come and visit me in half an hour. We were both thrilled to see each other. We sat in the hotel bar and sought to catch up from the last time we had met about three years ago. I congratulated him on his recent promotion to Reader at Birkbeck College, a constituent college of the University of London, of which he was obviously proud. He discussed his trajectory in the context of the challenges facing African academics and university academics in general in British universities. He lamented the petty jealousies demonstrated by some of our colleagues, including fellow Malawians in the UK and former British lecturers such as James Gibbs, who had taught in the English Department at the University of Malawi in the early 1970s; how he and his wife, Patience, a Ghanaian writer, had not even congratulated him; how, in fact, Patience had pointedly said to him that the job he previously had back in Bath should have gone to her husband, who was then unemployed.

For the rest of the evening we discussed my project. He talked at length about the current state of relations between the two main groups that constitute the Afro-British diaspora, those from the continent and those from the Caribbean. There are tensions among those groups based concretely on a struggle for resources, and symbolically on claims to westernness—to intimacies with and approximations to Britishness and modernity. It was difficult but necessary to negotiate these tensions. He noted how a scholar of Stuart Hall's stature had refused to deal with race until the late 1980s and 1990s, and how he once reacted indifferently to Mpalive at a conference where they were the

only two black professors. Even more alarming is Paul Gilroy's evident dislike, even hatred, of Africa and Africans. He mentioned several other less prominent Afro-Caribbean British scholars who have difficulty dealing with Africa and Africans.

The challenges of race and racism manifest themselves in a variety of ways among academics and students. He gave a few examples. There was a biracial Nigerian PhD student who was very bright but confused about his racial identity. Mpalive tried to advise him, but to apparently little effect. On an application form, he listed himself as "white." While Mpalive explained to his colleagues that, as biracial, the student indeed had a right to choose whether to classify himself as "black" or "white," but it was an indication of his flight from the social identity of blackness that non-whites in Britain are labeled with. As Mpalive feared, this young man has yet to find a job seven years after he completed his PhD. The debilitations of a confused racial identity have probably played a role. Then there was the white female student who sided with Afro-Caribbean students who sometimes accuse Africans not only of selling their people into slavery but also of being more accommodating to the white power structure. Her relationship, and resulting pregnancy, with an Afro-Caribbean crack-head in Brixton seemed to have convinced her of her immersion into radical blackness. A clear case of a white person taking advantage of African-Caribbean tensions to reinscribe white privilege.

Returning to the tensions between the two communities, he noted the case of an Afro-Caribbean graduate student who was shocked to find Mpalive teaching English. She refused to enroll in any of his classes but tried to get assistance from him. When he insisted he could only continue helping her if he became one of her supervisors, she became more resentful. Her apparent hatred of Africans increased when one of her friend's brothers was killed by an African and she would openly express the opinion that Afro-Caribbeans hated Africans. Similarly, resentment was even expressed in one of his seminars, to the surprise and consternation of his non-black students. The discussion became so heated that those students seemed to have forgotten he was an African. Then there was the question he was asked at a black bookstore: "why would they go all the way to Africa to hire you instead of one of us?" Mpalive noted wearily that he was "one of us," that he had been hired at the Birkbeck College from the University of Bath, not from Africa. We laughed and shook our heads at each story, but it was a painful reminder of the fraught relations within the British African diaspora.

June 29, 2008

What a difference familiarity makes, I reflected as I walked toward my old alma mater, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) from the hotel, past the British Museum and Russell Square. It was indeed very close, less than a ten-minute walk, as Mpalive had indicated when I walked him out of the hotel last night. From SOAS I walked past the University of London's Student Union to the bookstore that used to be called Dillon's when I was a student here 30 years ago and is now called Waterstone's. I went into the bookstore briefly and was about to ask for titles on black British studies when I realized I hadn't brought my credit card. Instead, I perused travel writing books located on the first floor, and fingered a few that I promised myself to buy later on, including Paul Theroux's travelogue from Cairo to the Cape. I reckon that's what I have been doing in these travel notes; perhaps reading travel writing will

help hone my skills. I was only able to buy the latest issue of the *New African*, which has become pathologically obsessed with disparaging the West and defending African tyrants like Mugabe. We should be able to criticize the West without condoning African dictators.

I had spent the morning after waking up blissfully late enjoying one of the great comforts of familiarity: reading newspapers—*The Observer* and *The Sunday Independent*. The offer of free newspapers immediately endeared me to the hotel. By the time I left the bookstore, it was after 2:00 pm and I was hungry. I stopped by a bar-restaurant nearby and ordered—in good-old colonial English style—tea and fish and chips. I sat outside watching people walk by and marveled at how cleaned-up the buildings seemed to be from the way I remembered them. Walking on Tottenham Court Road toward Easton Road, the route I used to take in 1977–78 when studying at SOAS, provided further confirmation of the renovations that have taken place and were still going on as evident by the reconstruction of old buildings and construction of new ones. Gone were the grimy walkways and dingy clothing stores where I used to buy £2 shirts and £29.99 suits. They were replaced by fancy electronics and furniture stores. At the corner of Tottenham and Easton Roads were gleaming glass towers where there had been empty space and cranes dangling with construction blocks for new buildings. Easton Road turned into Marylebone Road and after the Great Portland Street station, I came to the International Students House where I used to take my meals when I first came to the University of London. I didn't remember the statue of John F. Kennedy alongside the building.

From there I walked to the residence hall where I used to stay ten minutes away, the International Studies House on York Terrace East, just behind Regents Park. The whole area looked spruced up, its rows of immaculately clean, cream-colored apartments smelling of new money, of gentrified city life which was missing in the late 1970s. Little looked familiar in the lobby of my old residence hall, except for the dingy entrance. There was a montage of student pictures; happy, smiling faces of foreign students cheerfully celebrating new encounters and friendships and experiences in the old imperial metropole we had been raised to admire and cherish. I lived here for four months, sharing an apartment with Paul Ishaya, a Nigerian student enrolled at the London Zoo. He is the one who introduced me to the culinary wonders of West African cooking; the joys of experimenting with dishes and spices. We lost contact after both of us left London in 1978. As I lingered in the lobby, long-buried memories of my first months in London came flooding back—the drinking and parties, the challenges and excitement of dating, the stirrings of Pan-Africanism, and the intellectual and political energies and agitations of youth. I suddenly felt old. I wondered what the three Asian students at the vending machines would be like in 30 years' time.

On the long way back to the hotel, I stopped by an Internet café. The hotel Internet charges are absurd: £6 an hour! The cafe charged £1 and I stayed for two hours making appointments for interviews and responding to various messages. It was while in the café that I got a text message from Mpalive inviting me to a musical. I got to the hotel after 6:00 p.m. Ten minutes later Mpalive called from downstairs.

It was a fabulous evening, beginning with the walk to the South Bank across the legendary Thames and the pride of British history and architecture, history and modernity, the Westminster buildings and the London Eye. I had not been to this part of London before. As a student, I used to despise all the symbols of British power and empire. Now, I felt like a tourist eager to see and sample the landmark sites.

On the way, Mpalive filled me in on African politics in London, the sleazy side of the diaspora. I had asked him about the African Center, which in my student days used to be our center of cultural activities—southern African liberation fighters, writers, visiting intellectuals, artists, and musicians all gathered there. That is where we went to for a taste of African food or to introduce our dates to spicy West African cuisine—egusi soup, jollof rice, etc. I was salivating as I recalled. The Center had now been closed for almost two years, Mpalive explained. He had been on the Executive Board, in fact even served as chair. He was shocked at the level of corruption, the lack of professionalism, the incompetence of its director. The building became neglected and decrepit. When challenged by Africans who were not black—a South African Asian and a Moroccan—the director hid behind blackness, invoking racial solidarity for support. When Mpalive challenged him, he mobilized his West African cronies to oust Mpalive. The real crunch came when the board secured £3 million from the state. All hell broke loose; all manner of chicanery was unleashed, including attempts to sell the building. A sad testimony to the indifference and ineptitude of the director and his supporters was revealed when Miriam Makeba was booked at the hall but the event was not only poorly advertised, the microphones were not working! Such are some of the loud Pan-Africanists we have in London, Mpalive concluded, unconscionably corrupt and callous.

Queen Elizabeth Hall was full, mostly with South Asians. The musical was sponsored by the Asian Music Circuit and the production was directed by a colleague of Mpalive's, with whom he co-taught a course on African and Indian cinema. He introduced me to her during the break. The first part of the evening was taken up by a film documentary on some illustrious Indian female singers over the centuries and up to the twentieth century. The second part offered a musical play entitled "The Dying Song," a luminous celebration of thumri music, the feminine form of Indian classical music, woven around an androgynous character who finds love, first for a man and then for an abandoned child whom she adopts, forsaking her husband. A tragic singer, she gives us her last song, a wonderfully evocative song of romance, love, and loss. It was simply brilliant. The audience clapped with thunderous approval at the end. The director and writer, Sangeeta Datta, came to the stage with the actors and we all cheered them.

It's amazing what a wonderful performance can do, taking your imagination into a journey of celebration and contemplation of the possibilities and perils of the human condition. The cool evening air and the lit buildings shining in the clear, night sky and the tranquil waters of the River Thames added to the magic of the night.

June 30, 2008

The interviews began in earnest today. I couldn't have wished for a better interview than Onyekachi Wambu, whom I first met in 1998 in film school for the documentary, *Hopes on the Horizon*, produced by Blackside in Boston, and last met in October 2007 when I was invited to speak on a panel of authors from a collection he had edited, *Under the Talking Tree*. A soft-spoken man who doesn't look his age, with an easy smile, he has a sharp intellect and an impressive understanding of black British history and the wider African diaspora.

I took the underground from Tottenham to Vauxhall, changing at Oxford Circus. AFFORD, the organization he works for, has an unassuming set of offices on the first

floor of a nondescript building. I arrived ten minutes earlier than our scheduled appointment at 3:00 p.m. As he finished a phone call, a young Kenyan woman took me to the conference room and prepared a cup of coffee. We began talking about Kenyan politics. Onyekachi joined us and made some fascinating comments on the failure of transitions—in countries like Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique—from liberation politics to democratic politics rooted in the monopolization of legitimacy by the national liberation parties, which always painted opposition parties that emerged after independence as unpatriotic, as Mugabe has tried to do in Zimbabwe. On that score, the hope for South Africa is the split within the ANC so that the legitimacy of the liberation struggle does not become a basis for discrediting the opposition, as the ANC can easily do with the ethnic parties—the Democratic Alliance and Inkatha.

Then we withdrew into a smaller office where we talked for the next two and a half hours. It was a tour de force. I wished I had recorded the discussion. Onyekachi traced the development of Black Britain from the beginning to the present. From his overview, seven periods could be distinguished. The first was the Roman period when Africans came together with the Roman armies that occupied the island. This population was eventually absorbed into the British population. Recent DNA evidence of a community in Yorkshire has shown this community's links to the African group that lived in the area during Hadrian's period. This was followed by the second period, the Middle Ages, beginning with the Africans who came during the Crusades, the most famous being St. Francis from Nubia. Moors and troubadours arrived in noticeable numbers during the course of the medieval era. The third period was during the era of the Atlantic slave trade and the globalization of Europe. Evidence of the growing African community is abundant in literature in the works of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and others.

The number of Africans in London, for example, became large enough that Queen Elizabeth I complained and sought to have them deported. The African diaspora in Britain increasingly became active in anti-slavery efforts, led by men like Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho who formed organizations such as the Sons of Africa in the 1780s. The waves of Africans comprised those who came directly from the continent, servants of British planters and officials returning from the Americas, and following the American War of Independence, an influx of African-American loyalist troops in 1776–1880. He gave me the names of two scholars who have written on this—Steve Martin and David Dabydeen. The African diaspora community increasingly faced hardships and some of the black poor were repatriated to Sierra Leone, which was founded in the 1790s. Those who remained, increasingly married whites so that mixed-race blacks became an important part of the community. Many of them were activists, and during the post-emancipation period, which constitutes the fourth era, their radical politics was an integral part of social struggles for civil liberties and expansion of citizenship rights. Several became influential members and leaders of the Chartist Movement, for example. After the 1850s, however, you don't hear much about black politics and the community virtually disappeared into the wider population through intermarriage. A new black population began to emerge in the 1880s, consisting of sailors and students mainly from West Africa. Colonialism marked the dawn of a new period—the fifth—during which the influx of new African populations began in earnest. They settled in the cities of Liverpool and Cardiff, and by the 1920s, Somalis were settling in Middlebury. Paul Robeson met some of these people during his British visits. Their offspring consider themselves the oldest continuous black community in Britain.

The majority of today's black British are products of the remaining three periods, which accelerated with the post-World War II wave of Caribbean immigrants marked by the arrival of the Windrush group. Many of them were of working class backgrounds, and Jamaicans were dominant. Many expected to stay briefly and go back. But, as working-class people, it proved difficult to save enough and return, so they ended up staying and establishing roots. Their offspring became even more engaged in British society and struggled for recognition as British citizens. Growing up black in Britain in the 1960s often meant immersion into the Caribbean community. He recalled that as a child of Nigerian parents, he felt partly Jamaican; the Afro-Caribbean British identity established the parameters of blackness. At that time, many of the Africans who came to Britain were students and professionals who usually stayed for short periods and returned home. Consequently, they failed to adjust to British society, to develop a diasporic identity. He illustrated this with an example from this own family. For years, his parents did not change the wallpaper in the house because they expected to return to Nigeria any time. It wasn't until 1978 that the wallpaper was changed when it became clear that they were here to stay.

The seventh, and most recent, period began with the influx of Africans starting in the 1980s. Many were of course fleeing from the economic crises of structural adjustment. Unlike earlier African migrants, the new waves were coming to stay. They included some who had returned home in the 1960s and 1970s, among them Nigerians who had returned home during the oil boom years and were now coming back to Britain, having lost their assets in Nigeria. Africans began to embed themselves in British society, to create institutions, including churches, and to fight for British citizenship and rights. Their children, like those of the Caribbean compatriots, began to see themselves as British. Today, the majority of black people in Britain are from the continent, no longer from the Caribbean. If, in the past, Afro-Caribbeans determined the definition of a black British identity, now and in the future, continental Africans will determine it.

Currently, then, there are at least five groups of people of African descent in Britain, I surmised. First, those descended from pre-World War I black populations, themselves of diverse origins. Second, those of diasporic origins largely descended from the enslaved populations of the Americas, especially the Caribbean. Among their activists and intellectuals, Africa was often seen as a single entity, as the basis of a global Pan-African identity. They include such figures as Garvey, George Padmore, and C.L.R. James. Third is the postwar generation of Africans who came to study, who often had broad conceptions of African identity in comparison to the postcolonial economic migrants who maintained strong connections with Africa and who often lived their African identities on a daily basis in the mushrooming African communities and as a result of their linguistic competencies and affiliations. Fourth, the offspring of African migrants who don't speak African languages but can retrace their connections to the countries of their migrant parents' origin. While their parents often send remittances to their villages, the children target the countries of their philanthropic interest. Fifth are the North Africans, the African Asians, and African Europeans. The North Africans are often organized as Arabs or Muslims, but few identify themselves as Africans. Even when Muslim leaders identify as African, they are often unable to attract followers. Asians from eastern and southern Africa often exhibit generational differences. While the parents who migrated from Africa have a yearning for Africa, their children tend to identify with the wider Indian diaspora. As for white Africans, they sometimes identify as Africans, but when convenient or strategic, they revert to their British or European identities. Among these groups, the

weakest identification with Africanness is most evident among the Arabs, compared to the Asian and European Africans.

Thus, it is exceedingly difficult to define a black British identity as the population has become more diverse in its origins and complex in its identities and affiliations. Adding to the complexity is that mixed marriages between blacks and whites are increasing. Fifty percent of Caribbean men are in mixed marriages and a slightly smaller percentage of women are. Thus, the Afro-Caribbean population is becoming more mixed at the same time as the black African population is expanding. Under such circumstances, serious questions are raised as to what it means to be black.

Also contributing to the challenges has been the fracturing of the wider political black identity. Previously, the term *black* referred to all non-whites. The identity politics of the 1980s, reinforced by the politics of multiculturalism and availability of state funding, led to the splintering of this broad black identity into its constituent racial and even religious and cultural parts. Asians demanded a separate identity and distinct support and Africans began asking for a separate space within Carnival, which was long associated with Afro-Caribbeans and other cultural institutions. Onyekachi witnessed this splintering directly in the experience of the newspaper, *The Voice*, which he once edited. *The Voice* saw itself as the collective voice of black Britain, unlike the papers that existed before them, such as the Jamaican *Gleaner* that largely catered to a specific Caribbean audience or even national audience. *The Voice* focused on all the big issues that were signifiers of black internationalism, such as apartheid and black American struggles. It was so central that every aggrieved group would call to vent perceived slights or negligence—based on national or regional origin, cultural or religious affiliation, or even sexual orientation and gender interests. The paper, in short, was expected to cover everybody. Now *The Voice* has lost its own voice, as it were, its own media of representation, its own niche.

Given the impact of the demographic and representational shifts within the black British population, it becomes imperative to create a new, overarching discursive and organizational framework for a new black politics. The old black politics has lost its salience. The challenge is to create a new diaspora politics, one premised on transnationality not simply Britishness, let alone Englishness, a politics of diasporic transnationality that allows people to be comfortably Nigerian and British for cultural and economic reasons. He recounted the emblematic story of the Bruno-Lennox boxing contest. Bruno presented himself as the British fighter versus Lennox, the transnational fighter. The latter's victory was poignant, representing the triumph of transnational citizenship. Onyekachi believes that Britain is too small, too confining to sustain a viable black identity, indeed the idea of black Britain is not big enough to be sustainable and to produce anything but mediocrity. Black British institutions, at best, simply provide training for other institutions, for once anyone becomes good enough they are snatched up by mainstream institutions. The only viable spaces where excellence can be produced and retained are through transnational diasporic spaces and institutions.

This is why, he explained, he joined AFFORD, an organization that allows him and others to do Africanity in all its complexity. Its transnationalism provides a basis for a profound reversal of roles between Africa and Europe in repositioning the traditional periphery-core relationships, in which Africa is periphery to Europe's perpetual core. Instead, Africa is turned into a possible center to a provincial Britain. This reformulation can provide a way of solving problems here, a source of diasporic power, not its negation.

The next big question among black British will be both their transnationality and their Britishness. The first is propelled by the demographic shifts and globalization, the second

by the fracturing of Britain into its constituent ethnic and regional parts—England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland—facilitated also by the forces of globalization as mediated by the European Union project. The European Union has facilitated the rapid development of Ireland so that now Northern Ireland is increasingly tied into the economic rhythm of Dublin rather than London. In the meantime, Labor has become a party of irredentist Scotland and Wales while the Conservative party is in essence an English party. The vicious attacks against Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the English press are partly motivated by English nationalism, the growth of English identity—the flag of St. George is back. In this context, when British identity itself is fracturing, the construction of a black British identity becomes unsustainable. But retreat into a black Englishness is untenable; hence, the attraction of a transnational diasporic identity.

It was a complex argument and I may have oversimplified it. But it was clear for Onyekachi that transnational diasporic identity was the only effective way of accommodating the diverse peoples of African descent, of enabling them to work together, facilitating their navigation of here and there, of leading better lives here based on affiliations with there and the mobilization of the affirming resources of there.

The changes in the identities and place of the black community in Britain have also been facilitated by shifts in state policy towards multiculturalism engendered by black struggles. Throughout their history, the black British have had to deal with racist policies and attitudes. The old black communities of Liverpool, Cardiff and elsewhere that were established before the Second World War have borne the brunt of marginalization. They have found it hard to integrate and get jobs. Deep tensions persist between them and their cities. Also, they find it hard to join hands with the newer black communities who have been more successful, because of their numbers, to organize resistance that is more effective. The struggles have ranged from the creation of an oppositional press that highlights the prevalence of the effects of racism in British society to the creation of cultural spaces and institutions such as Carnival, which emerged as a critical site of resistance and affirmation. There have also been the periodic outbreaks of riots and violence, including, most recently, the Brixton riots of 1981 and the Broadwater Farm riots of 1985 in which one policeman was killed. The police raid that followed these riots led to the eruption in Tottenham. These struggles forced the British state and society out of their slumber of racial denial and to recognize the seriousness of Britain's racial question, that if it was not dealt with it might mutate into an emergency, a second Northern Ireland on the mainland. Thus were born multicultural policies.

If multiculturalism sought to recognize and accommodate Britain's diverse non-white population—the collective black community—it also facilitated the fracturing of the community between Asians and Africans and within each group insofar as it encouraged identity politics and identities could be broken up into even narrower constituencies. Within the African-descended community, the differentiation was not confined to the continental-Caribbean divide, let alone the national identities of Africa's new immigrant communities. A class dimension has emerged. Previously, African immigrants had been confined to professional elites. This encouraged the stereotypes that Africans were better educated than the Caribbeans; and that the latter were rougher and rowdier than the former. Africa's economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s opened up the immigration flow to working class and rural peasants who brought to Britain cultural baggage different from that carried by the elites. One result of the economic and social dislocations was the emergence of coping mechanisms and desperate rituals of witchcraft, exorcism, and the like that immigrants brought with them to British cities. The poor African families,

and especially their children, often find themselves trapped in cultural practices that reinforce popular racial notions of African backwardness; the papers publish lurid stories of ritual murders that Africans of elite and middle-class background find deeply embarrassing. And now, performance indicators between Africans and Caribbeans have become similar, certainly in schools.

The class divisions within the African immigrant community and the diaspora at large, and their cultural, social, political, and economic implications need to be acknowledged and discussed more openly, and strategies must be developed to bridge them, he stressed. Churches are playing this role, where you find membership drawn from the professional elites as well as the struggling, uneducated poor. We need to develop more such spaces and institutions, and study more systematically how they operate.

While there are now more prominent Africans in public life (in entertainment, the Africans are now eclipsing the Caribbeans—he gave the example of Sade, Seal and several actors), the African diaspora needs to make a strategic choice between what Diran Adebayo, the novelist, calls the Irish and Jewish paths: becoming a large working class, or even underclass, or small but influential minority, respectively. He gave me Diran's contact.

Another issue that demands serious study and redress concerns gender relations and sexuality. Many African or black women are appalled by the patriarchal attitudes of their men to the point that some have withdrawn from collective politics involving men into more personalized politics of blackness. This has serious implications for gender solidarity, for building effective movements and strategies to empower the black community and strengthen its linkages to Africa. Another subject that is often ignored in black British and diaspora discourses in general centers on sexuality, specifically, the public condemnation of homosexuality even if in many instances gays and lesbians might be tolerated in private. The discrepancy between private tolerance and public attack seems rampant in the Pan-African world, from his Nigerian homeland to the Caribbean where his wife is from. What accounts for this? He had heard in Jamaica that under slavery, homosexual rapes were used to strip men of their masculinity; he wondered whether collective memories of this has anything to do with the public disapproval of homosexuality, while many prominent, undeclared gay men, from Rex Nettleford to P.J. Patterson, were individually tolerated. In Northern Nigeria, the situation seems similar and widely known in the military among Northern officers. We need to explore these taboo subjects in diaspora studies as part of systematic efforts to understand the values and experiences that connect and divide us.

The composition, identities, and interactions of the black British have not only shifted internally but also externally. Among the Caribbeans, there are those who see the Caribbean as home, with which they seek to maintain active contact, while others see Britain as home. Such differences are more muted among Africans, many of whom are recent arrivals.

For a long time, black America played a huge role as a signifier. Now many in Britain see African Americans as part of the American project. Onyekachi became personally bored by this narrative when he briefly lived in the U.S. for the filming of the *Hopes on the Horizon* documentary. He was amused by the widespread assumption that he would feel privileged to become an American. He is now much more interested in explaining black people's experience with modernity in Brazil than in the United States. At heart in the black world is the question of who should speak for this world, whose experiences are paradigmatic? Nigerians believe that given the size of their population, they have a stronger claim than African Americans. We couldn't resist discussing the implications of

Obama's candidacy in all of this. He is writing a commentary for *The Zeleza Post*, which will be posted as part of the eSymposium on the Obama phenomenon. And as he walked me back to the tube station, he suggested that I talk to someone about the role of religion, specifically Islam, in the construction of African diasporic identities and transnational ideological networks. That forced us to stop and discuss this intriguing subject for another ten minutes, the ways in which conversion to Islam is further complicating black British identities. We agreed to meet again. I left with deepened respect for him.

Before returning to the hotel, I stopped by an Internet café, and later an Italian bistro for dinner where I sat outside watching people walk by. This is the way research ought to be conducted. What a long way from my graduate student days!

July 1, 2008

Having paid an exorbitant sum for breakfast yesterday in the hotel, today I tried a little café facing the British Museum a couple of minutes' walk from the hotel. It cost about a third of the price. From there I walked to SOAS for my first appointment of the day. There was nobody in when I knocked on the office door. I was about to go to the library when Chege Githiora walked in. Although we had never met before we both assumed who the other was and greeted each other warmly.

Chege is Kenyan so we spent time sharing names of people we knew. He had studied for his PhD at Michigan State University so that expanded the circle of familiar friends and colleagues. His dissertation was written on Afro-Mexico and he spent six months doing research in Xalapa. I had been to that part of the country and this added to a sense of connectedness. I suggested to him that I was particularly interested in his comparative views of Afro-Mexican and black British diasporas. We both agreed that the involvement of African scholars in diaspora studies is critical because we are likely not only to raise new questions and offer fresh perspectives, but also we are more likely to see and capture African cultural practices, which the diaspora communities might assume are local and diasporic in origins and not derived from African antecedents and traditions. He gave examples from Xalapa; how surprised his interviewees and the people he interacted with were when he told them how familiar they were to him, such as women carrying goods on their heads. His revised dissertation will be published this fall by Africa World Press.

I had, of course, come primarily to talk about black Britain. Unfortunately, he has not done research on this area. In fact, he said he was itching to resume diaspora studies from his current teaching and research focus on Swahili. He was trained as a linguist and he is a Lecturer of Swahili, a job he got eight years ago.

Nevertheless, I still found his anecdotal observations useful and informative, although there was little that was new. He confirmed that the large growth in the population of Africans was redefining the definition of the diaspora in Britain in terms of African immigrants. For him, this raised conceptual issues in so far as African diasporas have largely been defined in terms of the forced migrations of slavery. Also worth noting in comparison to Mexico, was that multiculturalism here, unlike *mestizaje* in Mexico, allows and indeed valorizes the maintenance of a distinct black identity. Whatever its benefits, the policy of multiculturalism, which was largely driven by the liberal left and white guilt, reinforces the alienation of the black British; they end up being excluded from mainstream British society even if they are born and brought up here. Thus, multiculturalism helps maintain

the boundaries of otherness in fostering the creation and reproduction of little Africas and Asias. That, combined with the fact that many of the African immigrants are recent, the otherness of the African diaspora is maintained and reproduced. For their part, Afro-Caribbean British largely look to the Caribbean, not Africa, which further dilutes the cohesiveness of black British identity.

He also confirmed what I had heard, that relations between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans are often characterized by tensions that are engendered by competition for economic resources. These tensions, he insisted, are not structural. In his opinion, interpersonal relations are not as important as policy-driven dynamics, in which neither group plays a major role despite all the rhetoric about multiculturalism. Overall, in the political arena there is more Caribbean representation in political positions, such as members of parliament. Paul Boateng is one of the few top-ranking blacks of continental African descent.

Similarly, he had observed shifts in the class composition of African immigrants. He threw light on the cultural dynamics among these communities. There are now significantly large national communities and even ethnic communities so that national enclaves are being created in which people from one country can interact without the need for English, where they can eat their foods and practice their traditions with minimal interference from the larger British culture. So there are many Africas which provide safe havens for new immigrants and where large cultural institutions are created and can be sustained. The proximity to Africa, in contrast to the United States, where the physical and social distances from Africa are larger, mean that it is much easier for Africans in the UK to maintain contact and connections with their countries of origin, which undermines their attachment to Britain and the development and adoption of a black British identity. It is quite common for Africans to send their children to Africa for school and holidays. Alternatively, many parents are keen for their children to retain or learn their African languages. The teaching of Swahili, for example, is thriving, both in terms of training school teachers and students of African descent. The attractions of Britain's proximity to Africa influenced his own decision to accept the job at SOAS. This not only prevents these communities from coming together as Africans but for them to integrate with Afro-Caribbeans. Their identities as black British are prefaced and mediated by their national identities—Kenyan British, Nigerian British, Ghanaian British, and Somali British. Nevertheless, it is important to note that mixing among these communities is taking place in terms of intermarriage, doing business together, and through forming political and cultural coalitions to advance their collective interests.

Our meeting lasted for nearly an hour and a half. From his office, I went to the library, but they would not allow me in without a pass, which I couldn't get without a picture ID. So I went back to the hotel and brought my passport. It was a gorgeous early afternoon, sunny but not hot. The woman processing my daily pass, a friendly, heavy-set black lady, was surprised when I told her I had been a student here 30 years ago. She said I could get an alumni card if I wanted. The library didn't seem to have changed much in its layout except for the computer stations. There were not computers when I did my Master's in 1977–1978. It occurred to me I hadn't sat in a library in quite a while. I do all my library services online in my office at work or at home; when I need books, my research assistant gets them for me. I did a whole host of searches on works on black Britain and black Europe, and I ended up with a list of 90 references. I e-mailed the list to my account and I will order some of these books from Amazon when I get back. It is becoming clearer by the day that there is rapidly growing literature on the African diaspora. It's both intimidating and invigorating as I anticipate reading all these works and writing my future books and articles on the subject.

Next to the main SOAS building is a building that did not exist when I was a student. It is named after the Prince of Brunei and has a tiny bookstore on the first floor. I bought several books, a couple of which I look forward to reading during this trip. I can't believe I came without books to read!

I only had an hour of rest before trudging on the underground to attend the 7th anniversary reception of Africans United Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA). The Executive Director, Debbie Ariyo, who I had e-mailed for an interview, had invited me to the reception so that I could meet more people in the African NGO community in Britain. A short, pleasant, and rather ample woman, she warmly welcomed me and introduced me to the Chair of AFRUCA's board, an Ethiopian or Eritrean man (I didn't dare ask given the legendary animosity between the two groups), and other staff, including a man from Rwanda who prided himself in the number of East African countries he had lived in, and a Senegalese woman who was behind the production that we later saw. I arrived on time, 5:00 p.m. but it took more than an hour for the place to fill up, or rather for a good crowd to gather, for chairs were only half filled when it was time for the formal remarks. That allowed for mingling and conversations. People talked about the usual stuff, jumping from African to British politics, the economy, and Obama. They grilled me on what I thought about his prospects; had I heard that black Republicans had verbally attacked him, Debbie Ariyo asked; she was planning to be in the U.S. in November to witness this historic event. It was all fascinating cocktail chatter.

But there was one man who bothered me. A South African lawyer, who I ended up talking to, had been in Britain for 11 years. He defended Mugabe because the British and Americans were attacking him, and he defended Mbeki's quiet diplomacy. All this was bad enough, as far as I was concerned, except he was at least opposed to Zuma assuming the presidency. But what finally did it for me was his insufferable sexism; he blamed the problems facing young black men in Britain on their mothers who preferred to be single and get welfare checks because they couldn't stand living in traditional African marriages that kept families together; they hated men, and were confused by British feminists. I couldn't believe this nonsense. I walked away from him after protesting that surely women were not to blame, that there was nothing wrong in women aspiring for greater equality, autonomy, and respect.

Thankfully, the formal part of the reception soon started. An official from Child Services spoke for 10 minutes or so about new legislation for people and organizations working in the field designed to protect children from predators and abusers. Then the video was shown, a 12-minute overview of AFRUCA's work. The organization was established in May 2001 to promote the rights and welfare of African children in the UK and Africa. They work across London and a couple of other cities to help meet the needs of African children and their families and to help protect the children from abuse, harm, and exploitation. Specifically, AFRUCA seeks to raise awareness, provide training, influence policy, and promote community development. The four major areas of focus in terms of child abuse and exploitation are first, trafficking of African children; second, witchcraft and child abuse; third, female genital mutilation; and fourth, child sexual abuse. The video was powerful, tastefully understated without losing the poignancy and urgency of its message. I was glad I came.

The reception continued after the formal part was over but I didn't feel like hanging around much longer. I didn't recall ever being in that part of London, around the Bank tube station where the Royal Exchange and a concentration of corporate buildings are located. Even the building where the reception was held spoke volumes about corporate money and office opulence. When I got back to the hotel, I finally buckled and bought

£6 and 90 minutes worth of Internet service. I responded to and sent e-mails and read a few online papers. The urge to read them is not high here given the availability of four daily papers in the hotel, including *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times*. I checked Toyin Falola's USA/Africa Dialogue Series listserv and came across a stupid defense of Mugabe by Chinweizu Ibekwe, the irascible literacy critic. That reminded me of the South African lawyer. This agitated me into writing a blog entry entitled, "The Poverty of Nationalism and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe," which I posted before the Internet went off.

July 2, 2008

I was late to both my appointments today, which was rather unbecoming and annoying. I underestimated the amount of time it would take me to get from the hotel to my first appointment and this inevitably affected the subsequent appointment. I actually woke up unusually early and went downstairs to pick up my papers, which I read for the next two hours. I also finished the remaining time on the Internet account I purchased last night. Looking at the map of the underground rail system, I thought half an hour from Tottenham Court Road to Stratford, where the University of East London is located, was more than adequate.

Instead, it took nearly three quarters of an hour and I needed another quarter of an hour to find the campus. So I ended up being half an hour late. Kimani Nehusi had left my name at the entrance to one of the main buildings where the College of Education is located. There is tight security; students and staff needed to swipe their cards to get in. In fact, London is obsessed with security: there are CCTV cameras everywhere, in the tube stations, on the streets, on buildings. The terror attacks of July 7, 2005, on the underground and busses accelerated this frightening descent into an obsessive security state in morbid tribute to George Orwell's 1984. 7/7 is Britain's equivalent of the U.S.'s 9/11, but being such a compact island, security seems to have an intimate intrusiveness that is not as obvious in large American cities, let alone on university campuses.

Kimani came to get me from the entrance and we walked to his office in another building, past several buildings either under construction or renovation. Perhaps five-feet-ten, he wore a Rasta hat and the Caribbean twang in his accent immediately told me that despite his Kenyan name he was most likely originally from the Caribbean. This was confirmed soon enough when he volunteered that he was from Guyana. It happened that he knew, as I suspected he might, given Guyana's small population size and the nature of academic circles, both Bryan Moore who I used to teach with at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in the early 1980s and Cary Fraser, my former colleague at Penn State. Before we got to his office, we dropped by a coffee shop where he wanted to introduce me to some of his students—two black women sitting at one table and four white women at another. "He is a professor from the United States," he said proudly. His office was more like a classroom; there were four other desks and computers. In the midst of our conversation, one of his colleagues came in and worked on his computer for the rest of our conversation. I wonder what he made of it, two black men passionately discussing the sorry state of black people in Britain caused by racism.

It didn't take long to surmise that Kimani was an Africanist committed to activist scholarship. Throughout the course of our conversation, he mentioned several activist scholars, many not associated with academic institutions, and the wonderful work they were doing,

raising consciousness in the community. He invited me to a workshop on Saturday organized by the Black Parents Forum together with the Youth Learning Network. He insisted that activism and scholarship were not incompatible; commitment to the community and intellectual rigor were complimentary; and social relevance and academic respectability reinforced each other. I became quite keen, the more I listened to him, to read his work to see how he balances these demands. He told me about his book on libations, which is scheduled to come out in the next few months. It will be the first comprehensive history of this Afrikan ritual, African spelled with a "k," which traces its development from ancient Egypt to the present within Africa itself and in the diaspora. He gave me the manuscript's table of contents as well as an article he had just completed entitled, "'The Slave' as Slave Narrative: The Mighty Sparrow and (Re)memory in Caribbean Society," I perused the preface on the train ride, which was too short to tell me much about the quality of the book's contents.

He began by trying to explain the identity of black people in Britain. Identity was foundational to everything, he said, the basis upon which struggles and developments in all walks of life—economic, social, political, cultural—have sprung. As far as he was concerned, all black people in Britain were Africans. Community consciousness is growing even among those who have been here for several generations; they are becoming conscious of their African identity. The reconstitution of an African identity is quite complex, however. Among Afrocentricists, there is a tendency to glorify Africa, but such romanticization is surely a small price to pay since it's in the service of forging a strong African identity. What matters, in other words, is the objective of constructing an empowering identity, a self-conscious African identity even if the means or process through which this is pursued may be simplistic and idealistic. Not all Afrocentric-inclined people in the community, of course, are simplistic. He gave the example of a well-attended community forum in Brixton, attended by the Director of Museums in Nubia and several white British Egyptologists, at which the level and quality of questions was quite impressive to the surprise of the Egyptologist. One man in particular gave a calm and informed exposition, he said.

But he conceded that there are some blacks, including many from the Caribbean, who don't want to engage Africa, who have become sellouts, who are "coconuts," as he called them, an expression I had never heard before. The explanations for this are too well known for discussion, he noted. Those who are preoccupied with their black British identity are often confounded by the connections and contradictions between blackness and Britishness, a problem those who see themselves as Africans in Britain can avoid. Interestingly, the latter are in a much stronger position to assert themselves, to fight for their rights of citizenship, for a strong identity empowers them to demand equality and reject second-class citizenship. The growth of a strong African consciousness is shown in the increased popularity of African names, rituals of cycles of life—birth and death and several cultural practices.

He underscored the importance of culture, but noted that culture is dynamic. There are obviously cultural differences among Africans here, on the continent, and within each place. Migration and dispersal lead to cultural change. In fact, relocation to different environments often speeds up the pace of change, but the changes that take place contain within them continuities and discontinuities. He gave the example of the development of steel bands in Trinidad, which emerged following the banning of drums under slavery. Using the new instruments, the musicians continued singing Yoruba songs, or playing music that echoed the music of their African heritage. Similarly, the language and practice of masking in African performances developed a new trajectory through Carnival. The

changes can of course be both positive and negative; the new environment can be so stressful that anti-social and cultural practices emerge, as we are seeing in Britain with the growth of gang violence in which black kids are killing other black kids. What he finds encouraging is that these issues are being discussed; people are meeting and debating the meanings of African culture, the connections between being black, British, and African. Clearly, there are different sets of Africans at different stages in the development of their African consciousness.

Like everybody I have talked to, he noted the number of people from the continent has grown rapidly since he first came to Britain in 1985 from the Caribbean. People collaborated with each other politically and organizationally to achieve their own ends, especially to promote their interest in the universities and in workplaces. But these same sites were also places of conflict among Africans and Afro-Caribbeans based on mutual ignorance and hostilities engendered by competition for access and resources. Increasingly, however, there were signs of cooperation among Africans in supporting each other's business as more people have turned to the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities.

When we turned the conversation to African diaspora scholarship in Britain, he began by observing the widespread critiques, even anger, in the black community against the works of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, whose work is considered Eurocentric and wishy-washy in its preoccupations and analyses. Given their positions in the academy, they could have done much more to establish more empowering and relevant scholarly traditions on Africa and Africans at home and abroad. He noted that Africa is missing from their work and they focus on the present rather than giving the African presence in Britain a historical grounding going back to the very beginning of British history. He mentioned a number of scholars whose work is, in this regard, far superior to that of Hall and Gilroy. These scholars are very active in the community. They include Femi Biko, a founding member of the Association for Pan-African Studies Initiatives (APAS), who organized study sessions on the history of the Nile Valley; Robin Walker; Dez Robinson; Les Henry; Sandra Richards; and David McRichie, who wrote *The Testimony of Tradition: Ancient and Modern*. I made a mental note to check all these scholars' publications.

Kimani argued that the work of these more progressive scholars on Africans in Britain is characterized by four tendencies. First, it is more historical in that it seeks to give greater historical depth to the African presence in Britain. Second, it is multidisciplinary and even transdisciplinary. Third, it stresses connections to Africa and incorporates ancient Egypt. Fourth, it gives primacy to the cultural questions and issues of identity, which are critical to understanding the African experience and empowering Africans. The assault on Africans has been on their culture and identity, which the acquisition of citizenship cannot entirely address or provide redress for. African identities continue to be distorted and erased. Consequently, any research agenda or government policies that do not address this fact are doing a disservice to African people. Repeating what he had said earlier, he believes multidisciplinary approaches are essential to capture the similarities, continuities, and differences among African people to enable us to negotiate our way forward based on comprehensive cultural understanding and a fuller and more complete appreciation of African history and its importance to the world in the past and at present.

In this context, he lamented, the apparent failure of the South African government to address the questions of African identity has resulted in the xenophobic violence against other Africans that we have witnessed recently. This underscored, as far as he was concerned, the key role governments in Africa and the diaspora need to play in prioritizing the

question of African identity. If we understood and affirmed our identities as Africans, we would be able to sort out the issues and challenges that face us and change the world. The western world is frightened of a united Africa and diaspora capable of pursuing its own interests. He is wary, however of leaders who use the rhetoric of African solidarity while oppressing their own people, as was the case with Forbes Burnham, in his native Guyana, who supported the liberation movements but terrorized his nation. And I added Mugabe, with his anti-imperialist rhetoric and tyranny at home. Pan-Africanism, he believes, is very limited if it continues to be an ideology of the leaders and elites. It needs to be built from the ground up if ordinary people are to be fully engaged and embraced.

The recent bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade had given the African scholarly community an opportunity to organize itself and promote its consciousness-raising agenda. The British government had earmarked £12 million to sell its Eurocentric version of the slave trade and its abolition, highlighting the work of the so-called humanitarians, when Africans themselves were primarily responsible for their own liberation. The response of the community was very encouraging. They organized seminars and forums, and produced papers and video materials. He mentioned the papers by someone called Owowale who runs the Galaxy Community Radio station denouncing the role of Wilberforce. He also mentioned Toyin Agbetu, who broke into the Anglican Church ceremony attended by the Queen and Prime Minister Blair and denounced Britain for its role in the slave trade and hypocrisies about abolition, a gripping spectacle that was broadcast to the world.

He was forthright on one of the major shortcomings in the current scholarship and in the African community. He observed that there were different positions on gender. Most would agree this is a problem in the community, but they differ on their explanations. Some advance a flawed understanding that women's oppression and marginalization in the community will be solved once women replace men and assume positions of power. Others seek salvation by joining middle-class white feminist organizations and activities. For him, using and understanding Africa's matriarchal traditions would provide a basis for devising more progressive and inclusive gender relations. It was certainly the case that white people tend to see black men as more of a threat than black women who, therefore, tend to be favored in term of gaining access to education, jobs, and wealth. Some black men react by lashing out at women, others overcompensate by saying everything the women say about black men is right. The healthy thing is that people recognize that gender relations in the African community are problematic.

I was intrigued by his comment on the role of white women in interracial relationships, which he noted were increasing. Consequently, the number of mixed children is growing. Interestingly, many of these women are forced to deal with the racial problems their children face by trying to learn more about black history and culture. Thus, they become more conscious about black issues while their black men remain ignorant. Some of these kids hold on to their African identity, some become confused — they are "mixed race and mixed up," an expression that was poignant, funny, and troubling at the same time.

We ended with the usual rant you get among African diaspora scholars on the marginalization of Africans in universities and in the production of knowledge on Africa and its peoples. In Britain, there are exceptional white scholars such as Marina Sherwood, but many of them tend to focus on political issues ignoring cultural questions of more relevance or resonance to the black community. We are the only people who can deal with Africa's historical experiences most truthfully, he insisted, especially the historical

traumas of slavery and colonialism that still affect our communities and limit our opportunities for progress. And as he walked me to the entrance I had come through, he lamented that despite the growing number of black students in his university and others, some of whom greeted him as we passed them by, the curriculum remained as Eurocentric as ever. Many of these students also faced the challenge of negotiating a predominantly white institutional culture given not only their minority status but also the fact that they were often the first in their families to go to college. It was only when we were about to bid each other farewell that he intimated his desire to relocate to the U.S. He was tired of teaching here he said; he had only had one leave of three months since he started teaching in 1991, and he felt academically isolated. I was to hear the same refrain from my next two interviewees. Kimani hoped we would keep in touch and would appreciate if I informed him of any job opportunities or conferences.

By the time we parted after two hours, I only had half an hour until my next appointment. I had a sinking feeling that I would be late. I tried to send Hakim Adi a text message but it would not go through. I left my fate in the hands of the train. From Stratford on Central Line, I had to change at Holborn to take the Piccadilly Line to Oakwood. Even on the map, this looked like a long distance, which it did turn out to be. It didn't help my sense of agitation that I lost my ticket and had to purchase another one!

Meeting Hakim Adi was a sobering reminder of how little had changed in Britain in terms of the black academic presence in British universities and the production of knowledge on Africa and the diaspora. Now a middle-aged man with a balding patch and remnants of a working class accent, Hakim is a fellow alumnus of SOAS. We had apparently been there at the same time. He was a student 1976–1979, while I had been there 1977–1978, but I don't recall seeing him there. The last time we met was at the disastrously organized CIAD I in Dakar in October 2004. We were on the same flight out of Senegal. I was aware of his work on West-African students in Britain and the Pan-Africanist movement.

Hakim recalled that as an undergraduate student he had only seen one black professor, an African-American woman who had come to give seminar presentations in the Department of Geography, which he accidentally stumbled upon. The next day he brought several other black students to witness this dosage of color in the white halls of British academe. While students may see a few more black professors now, the numbers remained dismal. He only knew of three at SOAS, a lecturer in Yoruba, another in Swahili (Chege, who I had met) and in history, a South African. At his own university, Middlesex, which was reputed to be among the most diverse in the UK, he hadn't met other black professors; maybe they were in the medical and business schools, he quipped. The number of black British students in British universities had certainly increased, but few were being pipelined into the academy. Certainly not in the social sciences and humanities, which were being downgraded in the new economy of higher education, which emphasized the more lucrative branches of the academic enterprise—the more marketable professions. The Department of History on his campus had been gutted: four of the five professors had been prevailed upon to take early retirement and pressure had been put on him to go, but he didn't react kindly to such pressure so he stayed. He was now more isolated than ever, however.

African studies in the UK remains a marginal, beleaguered field. There are only three centers for African studies—at Sussex, SOAS, and Birmingham—but they have no presence outside their own circles; they enjoy no public visibility whatsoever. Thus, three decades after I graduated from SOAS, little had really changed. There were still few black academics. In fact, many preferred to migrate to the U.S.; he knew of three who had done

so recently. All this holds back the development of both African studies and diaspora studies.

Strictly speaking, Hakim felt there were no African diaspora studies in Britain as such, that is, structured degree programs in diaspora studies. Only a handful of people, perhaps as few as half a dozen that he could think of were teaching courses on African diaspora from a historical perspective. Most of the scholarship in the field was still in the early stages of mapping out the African presence in Britain, filling out gaps and elaborating on issues and topics laid out in Peter Fryer's landmark text, *Staying Power*, published in the early 1980s. An indication of how underdeveloped the field is can be seen in the fact that on those topics or issues he writes about, he is usually the first to write on them.

The development of African diaspora studies in Britain can be traced to the breakthroughs of the 1980s when two major conferences were held on blacks in Britain and the proceedings were published. Since that time, not many advances have been made. An Association of Black and Asian Studies was set up, but it has remained small with only two academics at present, including him. Most of its members are school teachers and museum staff. In 1990 and 1991, it organized small conferences. As for the African Studies Association in the UK, it is largely moribund, in his opinion; he stopped participating. Many of the people writing on the history of Africans in Britain, such as Fryer and Sherwood, are outside the universities. Very few students are working on dissertations on African diaspora history; he only knows of three or four students whose names he mentioned. There is more interest in local history, examining parish records—baptism, marriage, and death—in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England that yields some information on black Britons. He mentioned Habib's book on Elizabethan England (the same field as Hakim's own PhD). The local histories are produced by and are of interest to local historians, librarians, and museums.

Also of growing interest are studies on contemporary issues, especially on African migrations and new migrant communities in Britain. Hakim knew some studies done on Eritrean, Congolese, and Somali refugees. But even the scope of this work is limited. He has been trying to do a major project on Africans in London and applied for a grant of £1 million. Unfortunately, he didn't get the grant, but he will try again.

The field of African diaspora studies in Britain is limited compared to the U.S. because Britain lacks a long history of black studies, itself a reflection of the relatively small size and greater marginalization of the black British population. Also, the weight of Eurocentrism in Britain is particularly heavy, which leads to the strange denial that British history has any meaningful connection to slavery, colonialism, and peoples of African descent. Under such circumstances it is almost inevitable that British scholars in the field of African diaspora studies are activists as much as they are academics. They seek to demonstrate that African diaspora studies are an integral part of British studies. The growth of what has been called Heritage studies has been of some help in cracking the Eurocentric insularity of British history and studies in the schools.

The bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade last year played an important role in promoting African and African diaspora histories. Newly established maritime museums in Liverpool, London, and other major *entrepôts* during the slave trade feature African contributions to the development of modern Britain. The bicentennial reinforced interest in the African diaspora community itself and in schools in African diaspora history in Britain. Until now, U.S. influences predominated; you could find people, including school kids, who knew the icons of African-American history but could not name a single black British figure. Afrocentricism imported from the U.S. has been

particularly influential at the community level and has inspired political consciousness and organizing. In the schools it is common to find modules on the African American civil rights movement and nothing on Britain.

I was curious about the impact of cultural studies and increased African migrations on African diaspora studies in Britain. Hakim didn't think the work of people like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy had much of an impact on diaspora studies. He derisively noted that Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic* is not taken seriously here. Gilroy himself is not a big figure in black British studies circles. He kind of floats in a world of his own, more feted in the U.S. than here, Hakim said. For example during last year's bicentennial of the abolition of slavery Gilroy was largely invisible while Hakim spoke at 30–40 well-publicized events.

The influx of continental Africans, both from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, has had minimal impact on research, as far as he can tell, beyond inspiring some work on migration and refugees. As for the impact of this influx on the construction of black British identities, he was not too sure. While there is tremendous interest in the whole question of identities, it is not clear how it relates to or has affected research on the African presence in Britain. He was equally unsure about the impact of feminist research on black British studies. He mentioned a couple of books, Heide Metzer's *Black British Feminism*, and another by Delia Jean McCoy. But it was not clear to him how these studies, which were biased towards theoretical and contemporary issues, affected and enriched historical work on Africans in Britain.

We ended on a more upbeat note. He had taken me to a pub restaurant, which England is famous for. We were the only black people among the patrons having their late lunch. Hakim recommended the Thai dishes. I still felt rather full from the hearty breakfast I had eaten at another café around the corner from my hotel. After my exorbitantly priced breakfast in the hotel, I decided to sample a different café each morning, of which there are plenty near the hotel.

It was now 3:00 p.m. I asked Hakim about his current research. He lightened up. He is working on the relationship between communism and Pan-Africanism. Last year he spent time in Moscow looking at the archives of the Comintern, and next year during his sabbatical he will be spending time in Paris looking at the French archives. And he talked excitedly about a paper he had done several years back, which he wanted to revisit and publish, on the Committee of African Organizations, an umbrella group of fourteen organizations formed in the late 1950s which was the precursor of the British Anti-Apartheid movement. Many people, he said with twinkling eyes, often assume, incorrectly, that this movement was started by liberal white activists such as Trevor Huddleston. The role of the African diaspora activists has been eclipsed, and he was trying to recover that. The Committee established connections with the OAU and African diaspora groups in Europe. At its 1965 Congress, Malcolm X was invited as a speaker. It is critical to advance the work on Pan-Africanism beyond the well-known conventions/congresses and personalities, and to explore other organizational and ideological networks involving labor activists and others. He promised to send me the paper.

As I was on the Piccadilly Line, I decided to stop at Finsbury Park, not too far from the Seven Sisters station, where I lived on Leland Road, I believe, after leaving the International Students House in Regents Park. I wanted to check out the renowned New Beacon Books, Britain's first black publishers and booksellers, founded by John La Rose, a Trinidadian labor and political activist in 1966. NBB also ran a program of seminars, the George Padmore Institute (GPI), and La Rose once served as Director of the

International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books. La Rose died in March 2008 at the age of 78.

The bookstore is less than ten minutes' walk from the Finsbury Park tube station. It's smaller than its reputation and rather congested with books overflowing from the shelves to the floor like a study of an old, overworked professor. There were three women and one asked if she could help me; I told her I was looking for books on black Britain. She pointed me to a section marked *Black Britain*, although I found books on other countries, including Germany and France. I went book by book in that section and perused other sections on Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, literature, religion, and even the fiction section. By the time I was done there was only one woman remaining who happily made a receipt of the books I had bought, amounting to nearly £400. I asked her for recommendations of black British authors I could read and she suggested several. I had noticed one of my books on the shelves, on science and technology, and tried to do a bit of self-promotion and asked if the bookstore could order my other publications, which I proceeded to show her on my website. She promised she would. She said she was from Trinidad and had lived in Britain since the age of 16. Now she was a grandmother of three. She gave me a CD of La Rose's funeral—nothing gory, she assured me—and a list of forthcoming speakers for the GPI. Carole Boyce Davies, an old friend, was listed among them—she speaks on July 9. Unfortunately, I will be gone by then. She also gave me a newsletter of the Institute and hoped I would visit again. The books would be posted to Chicago. I took three novels with me.

On the way back, I stopped at an Ethiopian coffee shop and Internet café and responded to e-mails for an hour. The shop next door had inviting take-away food. I got myself tilapia fish and some beans and rice for my dinner, which I enjoyed in the quiet of the hotel room after a long day of hopping from one end of London to another.

July 3, 2008

It was my first visit to Canary Wharf, London's financial center and one of the world's greatest financial capitals, created in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher's resolute neo-liberal regime bent on shaking Britain from its socialist sclerosis. Called *The City*, it is a city within a city. Here are located many major banks, brokerage firms, insurance companies. Other enterprises of financial capital relocated and established their main offices in the gleaming glass and steel towers that come closest to American skyscrapers. Walking along the banks of the waterway, along which the lushest buildings stand proudly, it felt like walking along a smaller version of Chicago along the river.

The offices of Connections for Development were located about ten minutes' walk from the South Quay station. Shahid Sharif, the director of Connections, had given me detailed directions so I had no difficulty finding the building. A young British African woman came to open the doors. Shahid was finishing a meeting. He gave me a firm handshake and led me to another office, what looked like a conference room. A slim man with probing eyes and receding hair, he spoke with passionate eloquence leavened with expletives. A lawyer by training, he was born in Pakistan and came here as a child with his working-class family as part of Britain's imported labor from its former colonies. He displayed the acute sensitivities and grievances of the educated children of these labor migrants who resented the disrespect and discrimination endured by their parents and

their own marginalization and alienation from British citizenship, not as a legal status but as a cultural fact. He was worried about his children's generation, concerned that their lives would not be better, that each generation of black people in Britain seemed doomed to fighting the same battles. He explained that the term black, as a political term, referred to both Africans and Asians, which I already knew.

The origins of Connections for Development, a statutory agency, lie in a government white paper issued in 1997. The then new Labor Party government was keen to find ways of engaging African and Asian diasporas in its development efforts in those regions. A conference was held at which several diaspora organizations were represented and the Department of International Development called for the establishment of a new agency, out of which Connections for Development was eventually formed in 2003.

The diaspora has always been engaged with their countries of origin through sending remittances and maintaining all types of contacts. These connections are of course strongest for the first generation of migrants. The challenges of maintaining the same levels of commitment are evident for the third and fourth generations. It is essential to develop mechanisms to keep these generations engaged as effectively as possible. Also, international NGOs working in Africa and Asia are not used to emphasizing diaspora personnel and perspectives in their work. Similarly, governments do not incorporate diaspora experiences, ideas, and initiatives in devising their development policies, which would promote the quality and effectiveness of those policies.

Connections for Development sees its role as one of raising and mobilizing public awareness about the crucial role diasporas already play and can further contribute to development in the global South. It seeks to give the activities of the diaspora greater visibility and practical shape and effectiveness. It aims to showcase what diasporas already do and are capable of doing despite their marginalization in British society. Many of them may be in low-income occupations here, but they are still able to contribute significantly to development in their home communities. Thus, diasporas are receivers and givers, beneficiaries and contributors to development in both Britain and their countries of origin. They are the best placed to bridge the gaps between the two.

The key challenges, then, involve promoting recognition and mainstreaming of diaspora development activities, he said. These activities include, but are not confined to remittances. Remittances are already higher than aid. It cannot be overstressed that all societies have their own philanthropic cultures so that it is important to understand and tap into the cultures that motivate and reinforce the philanthropic behavior and practices of diaspora communities. Some of the activities diasporas engage in and the services they provide cannot be quantified. For example, people going back to teach, to assist their families and communities, to participate in local affairs, and to do all sorts of things that improve lives or increase opportunities. Incorporating diaspora perspectives in government policies and the work of international NGOs is a win-win situation for everybody interested in development. Diaspora conceptions of development are likely to be different and add invaluable dimensions to existing development discourses and practices.

Recognition and mainstreaming of the diaspora in development entails creating incentives and convenient and effective mechanisms for diaspora participation. In order for people, for example, to use officially sanctioned services such as remittance transfer mechanisms, those mechanisms must be more convenient and cheaper, but as trustworthy as the mechanisms they currently use. He commented on the rather politicized and negative impulses which are driving efforts to control channels of remittance flows, which

are inspired more by the anti-terrorist hysteria of 7/7 and 9/11 than promoting the welfare of the remittance senders and receivers. Somalia has been badly affected by this. Shahid lambasted the misguided aspersions cast on remittances to Pakistani madrassas as support for terrorism when foreign funds accounted for a miniscule amount of funding for these schools whose primary aim is education, not terror training.

Incentives can also include providing tax relief on remittances, a discussion that is currently underway. Other proposals include matching remittances by providing top ups or subsidizing remittance transfers. Connections for Development would also like to have more influence on country assistance programs. Much of British official development assistance or aid goes to budget support. There is a need to direct more resources to civil society. Connections would be interested in managing a fund comprised of 3–5% of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) for projects initiated by diaspora groups and local civil society organizations. Not all diaspora groups are of course keen to participate in organized efforts. For example, he talked to a group of Kenyan professionals who were investing in building schools and clinics who did not want to work with Connections or any UK-based agency or NGO. Diaspora groups should be free to determine their modes of participation and operation, but even for those who wish to be left alone it is important that their activities be widely known and publicized to underscore the role of diasporas in development.

He noted that 70% of the work of Connections focuses on Africa. This includes African diaspora groups and Caribbean groups focused on Africa. He emphasized the ways the term *black* is deployed to invoke common history of colonial oppression for peoples of African and Asian descent in Britain and mobilize them in their struggle against discrimination. The British black population is currently facing two major interconnected challenges, in Shahid's view. First, is the Europeanization project in which Britain's deeper integration into Europe, and the emergence of a Pan-European approach on a widening range of policy areas, including migration, is weakening Britain's linkages to its former colonies from where its black diasporas are derived. In short, Britain's Europeanization is being pursued at the expense of the Commonwealth, which, despite all its problems provides a web of historical connections and intimacies that have facilitated the development of the black diasporas in Britain.

It is important, for this reason, to maintain the Commonwealth and other institutions derived from and mediated by the history of empire as leverage for the diaspora, who in turn bridge relations between Britain and its former colonies. Under these circumstances it makes strategic sense to work with British nationalists coalesced around the Conservative Party who are critical or even opposed to the Europeanization project and committed to the Commonwealth. Diaspora groups tend to be pro-Labor, but they shouldn't put all their eggs in one basket; they need to work with both dominant parties to maximize their interests. It has taken Shahid nine years to convince his own father, for whom Labor is the natural party of both the domestic and immigrant working class, of the wisdom of this strategy. The Tories have committed themselves to devolving 0.7% of GDP, a goal long established in international development discourses when they came to power. Whether or not they will actually implement this pledge, it is essential to engage them while they are in opposition to shape their international development agenda and the role of the diaspora.

The second challenge centers on the increasing immigration of eastern Europeans into Britain, which is leading to more marginalization for blacks in the labor market and prospects for redress. As eastern European immigration has grown, more restrictions have been placed on immigration from Africa and Asia. Blacks also find themselves increasingly shut out of the low-skilled service jobs. Coinciding with this directly or not, in terms of

causation, is the displacement of race from public discourse in favor of the more nebulous discourse of diversity. Seizing on selective and deliberately misguided reading of a report on race relations in which multiculturalism has been blamed for engendering and sustaining the separations of racial and ethnic identities among the black minority groups—BMGs—thereby undermining the development of a common British identity, ethnic and racial groups are increasingly being defunded. In the meantime, funding is flowing to groups that seek to promote diversity, which are predominantly white.

Diversity encapsulates all forms of difference—gender, sexuality, physical ability, race and ethnicity, religion—thereby diluting the significance of racial discrimination as a defining feature of British society and the diaspora condition. In fact, the very language of public discourse is changing: discrimination is replaced by difference, equality by diversity. It is in this context that he is worried about his children's generation—they are losing the discursive ability to name and struggle against racial discrimination, which persists and is in fact deepening as eastern European migration makes blacks expendable. It is important for the black diaspora to think through the implications of the following changes: the delegitimization of the Commonwealth and race, the blurring of old left-right polarities of Labor and the Conservatives, and the changing demographics of immigration from Africa, Asia, and eastern Europe.

There is little doubt that diaspora groups are greatly underfunded and have huge difficulties accessing sufficient resources, both financial and human, to effectively discharge their broad remit of functions. He would like Connections to do a major research project to map out the scale of diaspora engagements in key development areas including health, education, and infrastructure, to provide a sampling of what is already being done and a projection of what could be achieved with greater support. I shared with him my plan to undertake a project along similar lines on African academics in North American, a survey of the size and scale of the African academic diaspora and their engagement with Africa, how those engagements could be enhanced more sustainably.

Governments in Asia and Africa could assist diaspora groups in working more effectively. The task of initiating linkages should not be left to the diaspora, nor should the diaspora only be courted during moments of national crisis, as India did, discovering the diaspora when it needed capital inflows to offset an impending financial crisis in the 1990s. Nor can we rely on fortuitous developments, again, as it happened to India, which benefitted from the new electronic technology boom in which the Indian diaspora was involved and was able to leverage technology and job transfers from the United States to India. There is a need for efforts that are more systematic, sustainable, robust, genuine, and honest. Now we lack good models, which obviously is a problem, but also an opportunity for different diasporas to experiment and find out what works best. African and Asian governments need to be more proactive and create incentives to facilitate their diasporas to contribute in-kind and through the investment of financial resources. He commended the efforts of the African Union to recognize and mobilize the potential of the diaspora. He noted that the AU had recently held meetings with the World Bank and diaspora groups in the Americas and Europe to develop mechanisms of promoting diaspora engagement with Africa.

Periodically, and especially toward the end of our conversation, Shahid offered interesting comments on British, European, and American politics in which the informed international development expert and diaspora advocate that he is gave way to an incensed activist, an impeccable foe of western imperialism and its hypocrisies. He blasted Tony Blair's insufferable arrogance and duplicity, the West's impetus for intervention in Kosovo that

only came, not because of the massacre—he called it genocide—of the Muslims, but because the prime ministers of Turkey, Pakistan, and other leaders of Muslim nations threatened to intervene. And he had nothing but contempt and invectives for George W. Bush's misguided imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He had even decided not to take his children to Disneyland in the U.S.—they had visited Euro-Disney instead—appalled at the prospect of defaming his name and country of birth, even if he was British, in the anti-Muslim bigotry of post-9/11 America. “And can you believe how they are treating Obama and his wife?” he railed, “fucking stupid, crazy, aren’t they?”

It is necessary, he said, returning to the role of the diaspora, to make connections, to work together. Connections had established a dialogue with PANOS in Paris and the UN. That is why he had answered my request for a meeting so promptly, he revealed with a compassionate smile. As he walked me courteously out of the conference room to the front door two floors below, he urged me to visit Canary Wharf and explained its history. I thanked him and followed his advice to explore the citadel of financial capital. I walked along the banks, across the bridge, into the vast shopping mall, and out to the train station. Canada, my adopted diaspora homeland, was well-represented with One Canada Square, the second-tallest building in the country.

By the time I boarded the DLR train back to the Bank tube station for transfer to the Central Line to Tottenham Court Road, it was during the late afternoon rush hour. Clamoring on board were exhausted bodies of men and women, young and old, workers and professionals, white, black, and every color in between. They were disgorged at each station, like swarms of bees, as other hordes replaced them. There were cameras everywhere and save for the rumbling roar of the train and ruffling pages of newspapers, the free evening tabloids distributed at train stations by anxious black and white youth, I was struck by the silence, the refusal to communicate, to establish contact, strike up conversations. Perhaps it was the morbidity of underground travel, I thought, dark fears of the unknown, intimations of burial. The London Underground system, a massive network of mass transit, surely must rank as one of the masterpieces of engineering.

For some strange reason, for dinner I bought a chicken burger, take-away, at a burger joint near the hotel instead of going into one of the restaurants or bistros for a sit-down dinner. Perhaps I had caught the affliction of silence, of loneliness in a large city. It then occurred to me that I was anxious to start reading one of the books I had bought. I settled on Kwame Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics of a World of Strangers*.

July 4, 2008

I had forgotten, until I got a strange e-mail from some group wishing me a Happy Independence Day, that today is America's Independence Day. Besides not being an American, it's hard to celebrate the day marking the independence of a country that enslaved our people for nearly 90 years after its independence and continued to deny them citizenship rights for another century, and still treats them as second class citizens today, let alone all the crimes of war and violence it has committed and continues to commit against many nations of the world.

Besides this unfortunate reminder, it was another productive day, this time enriched by perspectives from two African women on two often-neglected subjects, the diaspora dimensions of health and publishing.

I met Martha Chinouya in the hotel lobby a little after 2:00 p.m. We walked to one of the nearby cafés, sat outside sipping coffee, and discussed the subject she works on, the transnationalization of health care. A short woman, she was clearly excited talking about her work. Being Zimbabwean, we inevitably started by discussing the situation in that unfortunate country where I was born. She stressed how complicated the situation is and lamented its oversimplification in the British media. There are all these entangled historical, political, economic, regional, gender, and class dimensions. What will happen to Zimbabwe? she asked plaintively several times. Zimbabweans in the UK didn't seem to offer constructive solutions. In fact, they are quite divided. Whenever Zimbabweans meet and discuss the plight back home, the discussions are highly gendered, in that men seek to dominate. She revealed that as a young 22-year-old graduate straight out of college she had worked for a government department whose program was involved in making assessments for transfer of commercial white farmers to black farmers. Even she noticed the corruption: on the one hand the whites were reluctant to sell the land and they were aided by the head of the program, a white man, who would often declare the land unsuitable, and on the other hand was the government, which would distribute any available land to powerful and well-connected individuals rather than the peasants in whose name the liberation war had been fought and the program was designed.

Most of our discussion centered on her research on the health status of African immigrants, including Zimbabweans. She began by problematizing usage of the term *African* when referring to populations of African descent in the UK and the implications for health research. It is a loaded term that mixes race and place of origin. It both conflates and excludes. It includes people of Caribbean descent and mixed African and white descent, some of whom preferred to be regarded as Afro-Caribbean or black British. At the same time, it excludes North Africans who don't usually want to be identified as Africans. Consequently, North Africans tend to be excluded in health surveys on African peoples in the UK. Even for those who accept the term *African*, it covers too much insofar as it can ignore national identities and differences, which are evident in the distribution of health risks. HIV/AIDS, for example, is unevenly spread among Africans and it varies according to nationality. The highest rates are recorded among Southern Africans and the lowest are among West Africans. Differentiating the African Diaspora population might appear divisive but can be important for health research. She promised to send me a paper she had co-authored on the subject.

Then she talked about a major project she had worked on concerning HIV issues for Zimbabweans here in the UK and in Zimbabwe. She gave me a copy of the report, "TAURAI! [Communicate!], A dialogue of hope between Church Leaders and HIV-Positive Christians in the Anglican Diocese of Manicaland, Zimbabwe," which summarizes the research methods and findings. I was intrigued by her comments on two issues. First, there is the conflict between research methods recommended by human subjects' ethical guidelines and the practices preferred by the participants in Zimbabwe. While it was expected that project participants' identities be kept confidential, the participants in Zimbabwe objected to being isolated and talked to individually; they preferred discussions under a tree where all confidentiality was thrown away. These discussions focused on HIV, but other activities took place as well and the discussions were characterized by personal disclosures, negotiation, conviviality, and solidarity.

Her own identity as a Zimbabwean woman from the diaspora was also subject to discussion and negotiation. Simple things like the fact that she would drink tea at odd times during the day—not simply for breakfast—and drink it without sugar, marked

her as an outsider in spatial and class terms, a black *mzungu*. The second concerned the issue of translation and consumption of knowledge. When the report was published, she hadn't sent it to the people who had participated in the project. To Martha's surprise, she was told by the women that the reports were of little use to them except that they used them to make fire. Could she produce a video instead that they could watch to find out what her conclusions were? More than anything else, this underscored the communication gulf between academic researchers and the communities they sometimes research, the ways in which knowledge is consumed and valorized.

What I found particularly fascinating in Martha's animated discussion of her considerable research on diaspora health issues was the observation that for many recent African immigrants including the Zimbabweans, both health diagnosis and intervention are often transnationalized. It is quite common for individuals who get sick in the UK to call home before they consult a doctor. Their relatives in Zimbabwe consult traditional healers and their diagnosis is relayed to the UK resident who then goes to a doctor armed with that diagnosis. In fact, as in Zimbabwe, some consult both the medial doctors and traditional healers based in the UK. The latter have increased in numbers as the Zimbabwean population has grown.

The transnationalization of health conditions and care in the diaspora community is facilitated by the existence of transnational families and institutions. Not only do Zimbabweans in the UK seek to help their relatives who may be sick at home, but disease may be a cause of tension and rupture in families. She gave me the example of a woman who might discover her HIV status in the UK but is reluctant to reveal that to her mother who looks after her sickly infant to whom she transmitted HIV. There is also the role played by transnational institutions such as the Anglican Church, which has become increasingly involved in HIV prevention, treatment, and care. These institutions facilitate connections between their members in the UK and Zimbabwe, and through them, transnational interventions, indeed what can be called transnational prayers, are conducted and transmitted. She promised to send me various papers that she has written on these topics.

Martha has been in Britain for 19 years. She narrated the challenges she has gone through during this period and the changes she has observed. In her first year she worked as a chamber maid, then she decided to go back to school for graduate studies, finally receiving a PhD. She currently teaches at Metropolitan University. Over the years she has witnessed the growth in the Zimbabwean diaspora and its changed ethnic and class composition. Once dominated by the educated elites, many who were eventually absorbed into the formal economy, now there are more Zimbabweans from lower middle-class and working-class backgrounds and are increasingly engaged in the informal economy.

As for the wider African diaspora, little has changed in the tense relations between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans. The hostilities are not simply over access to resources and opportunities, but over history and issues that preoccupy each group. The Afro-Caribbeans accuse Africans of having sold their ancestors into slavery and complain that when they visit Africa they are often not made to feel welcome. While Africans are more recent migrants, they are preoccupied with resettlement and immigration issues. The Afro-Caribbeans feel a greater entitlement to Britain based on what they consider their longer stay in the country.

As we walked to my next appointment, scheduled at 4:30 p.m., Martha told me more about her background. She grew up in Bulawayo and went to school with Yvonne Vera. Tsitsi Dangarembga was one of her teachers. We reminisced about Yvonne and her early

tragic death. She hoped that we would be able to collaborate on a project and expressed how much she admired my work.

I had arranged to meet Becky Clarke at SOAS. She kindly agreed to come from Oxford and meet with me to discuss the politics of publishing as one of the few black women publishers in the UK. I have known Becky for many years and first encountered her when she worked at Heinemann, the publishers of my first and, so far, only novel, *Smoldering Charcoal*. She contributed a chapter to the book on *Women in African Studies Scholarly Publishing* that Cassandra and I co-edited. After leaving Heinemann, she established her own publishing company, Ayeibia Publishers, which has several titles, including some prize-winning ones, to its credit. I congratulated her for the short-listing of one of her authors for this year's Caine Prize. She and Ato Quayson have been trying to persuade me to contribute to Ato's edited book, *Fathers and Daughters*, to be published by Ayeibia. When I talked to her on the phone several days ago I finally became convinced to do it. The fact that Ayeibia will be publishing my blog essays helped tremendously. When we met she was beaming. "I have good news for you," she said. She told me that Ohio University Press is very keen on co-publishing *Barack Obama and African Diasporas: Dialogues and Dissensions*, my collection. I would be getting a new contract. A determined, charming woman, her British accent has echoes of her Ghanaian upbringing, and she dresses stylishly and carries herself with confident dignity.

We walked to a restaurant a couple of blocks from Russell Square. We ordered dinner. As we ate, she finished telling me about the travails and triumphs of trying to raise her biracial, son whose sojourn into an affirming self-identity included being taken and left in Ghana for a while, which transformed him; gave him a hunger for education. I have known many African and Caribbean parents in Canada and the U.S. who send their children back home to rescue them from racialized mediocrity, the bigotry of low expectations; to discipline them into acquiring the desire for class reproduction through education. It often works. It worked for Ezekiel Kalipeni's daughter Josephine, who was sent back to Malawi for a semester. She came back more focused, more mature. This offers a fascinating glimpse into the power of the homeland to instill ambition for success, to save the diaspora children of first generation immigrants.

She explained the abysmal state in which black publishers in Britain find themselves. Publishers, she emphasized, are powerful insofar as they set agendas for society through educational textbooks. Books are repositories of collective memories and values, cultural windows to the world, vital instruments for identity formation. And within publishing, what is truly important is the editorial process that goes into making a book. She lamented that this is where even Heinemann's *African Writers Series* (AWS) failed Africa. Although it had African editors, beginning with the legendary Chinua Achebe and followed by several others, the nitty-gritty of editing was done by an all-white team that not only brought their own western sensibility, but betrayed either incredible ignorance or indifference to African interests. She recounted the battles she fought constantly, even over covers and pictures. We can only ignore these big issues at our peril, she stressed.

Talking of covers, she bitterly criticized the pictures used in James Currey's memoirs, one of a black woman with a snake coming out of her head and inside a half-naked black boy. When she got the book at the recent Cape Town Book Fair, she confronted Currey and asked him why he would use such demeaning pictures. Currey's response: he likes them! And this was a long-standing, South African born editor of the *African Writers Series*. She recounted how they had clashed at a conference to commemorate the 50th

anniversary of the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, organized by Mpalive. While Currey ranted about the challenges of publishing African books, Becky disagreed. She observed that white publishers behave as if they are doing Africa a favor. Publishing Africa is a profitable business out of which many publishers have made a fortune. To her surprise, Mpalive showed more sympathy to Currey and the other whites gathered at the conference. In fact he had mostly invited whites; she was only invited at the insistence of a Nigerian SOAS professor.

She established Ayebia because she believes fervently in controlling the editorial process for books on Africa and the African Diaspora. An imprint like Heinemann's AWS may have become a canonical carrier of Africa's voice but it was never controlled by Africans; it was a strongly mediated voice, the West's Africa, not the Africans' Africa. A person like her with a lot of editorial experience had an important role to play in changing the situation. As a person from Africa now located here, she saw it as her responsibility to open spaces for Africa's voices to be heard on their own terms. This was not easy to do, however. People like her faced enormous pressures to conform, publish books that appeal to white audiences. Resistance against conformity often resulted in funding cuts, loss of workers, and almost being forced into internal exile. Unfortunately, our own people who are in positions of power and influence do not always see the importance of publishing as a crucial part of cultural production and black identity formation and self-assertion. So publishers like her end up being forced to depend on support from the white establishment. In her own case, the Arts Council has provided critical support for Ayebia. They continue funding her because they have obviously seen the quality and integrity of her publishing, but she cannot be sure how long this will continue. At this point we discussed ways of supporting African and diaspora cultural institutions and industries, the need to cultivate support from Africans in western philanthropic foundations and sensitize our own bourgeoisies to the importance of supporting those institutions and industries. The bottom line is, of course, to create vibrant markets among our own people for our cultural products. She commented on her unfortunate experiences with a fellow Ghanaian in a philanthropic foundation who had not even had the courtesy to honor his promises to meet with her. I contrasted this with my own experiences with Tade Aina, a dear friend, a decent man and brilliant intellectual who had influenced me to embark on this diaspora project and proceeded to fund it. We speculated on what gives rise to the two polarities in the philanthropic world.

I wanted to know about collaborations among black publishers in the UK. She prefaced her remarks by saying it was a sad story, there was a growing divide between the two dominant black communities, the Afro-Caribbeans and Africans. Nevertheless, they had formed the Independent Black Publishers Association. Among the members of the Association are Ayebia, Brown Skin Books, Bogle (the publishers of Walter Rodney's famous *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*), Tamarind (in existence for 20 years, established by a dynamic Caribbean woman, which publishes children's books. It was started when she noticed her own children drew pictures of themselves as pink), Printworks (led by Sheila Price who thinks it is her mission to teach Nigerians to write proper English), and the renowned Margaret Busby, of Ghanaian origins, who serves as a patron and advisor. They meet regularly and have established a stand at the London Book Fair, which is well attended by surprised visitors unaccustomed to seeing so many titles published by black publishers.

The fact that the publishing industry is so overwhelmingly white makes it imperative for black publishers to cooperate with each other, but also for black scholars and authors to patronize them. She was pleased to see that I understood this, that I had mainly

published my books with CODESRIA and Africa World Press, and that I would soon be publishing with her. I commented on my recent experiences publishing with James Currey, the atrocious covers he had used for the two volumes on my co-edited collection *Roots and Resolution of African Conflicts* that annoyed me so much that I refrained from taking a copy of one of the books to a public lecture I was giving on the subject at UIC's Great Cities Institute seminar.

Both for personal and professional reasons, Becky sought to counter the marginalization of black publishers by maintaining strong links with African publishers. She has established mutually beneficial linkages with publishers in Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Botswana and she is trying to work with magazine publishers. If you don't establish links with Africa or the Caribbean as a black publisher in the UK, you peter out, she said. She is concerned by the fact that in many African countries, British publishers still dominate educational publishing, the most lucrative part of the publishing industry. In some cases they supply up to 90% of school textbooks. This is the biggest challenge and opportunity which African publishers based on the continent and in the diaspora need to tackle jointly. As a publisher, she is willing to train editors with support from African universities. Indeed, one of her visions is to establish a branch of her publishing house in Ghana together with a training center for editors and a conference center for African scholars. I asked her whether she knew of Emmanuel Akyeampong's center in Ghana and she said she had heard about it from Ato Quayson. She would love to meet Emmanuel. I promised to introduce them if they both came to this year's ASA conference in Chicago. It was unfortunate that the African Publishers Network (APNET) and the African Books Collective had not advanced the interests of African publishers as much as they should have. One problem is that they are dependent on donor support.

As she talked of her visions, she couldn't resist telling me about her installation as Queen Mother. Choking with wonder and pride of her culture, she narrated the transformative power the experience had for her and her family, including her son and even her husband, who developed a newfound respect for her and her culture. Her family had risen to prominence in the context of colonial rule, their ability to use colonialism to accumulate the economic and cultural capital of education and land purchase. They were both Christians and custodians of traditional power. As Queen Mother, she had access to large tracts of land where she dreams of building her publishing house and center. Perched on a hilly landscape, it was an incredibly beautiful area, she enthused. I was reminded of the plot of land I bought in Blantyre. Diasporic yearnings and acquisition of Africa's beauty and bounty, I wondered.

Writers face the same challenges as publishers, she continued. Black writers are under intense pressure to write stories that appeal to white sensibility. Many, of course, do not prosper. A few are occasionally helped and showered with prizes, such as the Caine Prize. The younger diaspora writers mostly focus on experiences in Britain, although they might incorporate a bit of Africa that white Britons are comfortable with. By publishing a few token black authors, white publishers can disclaim racism and claim they publish authors of all colors. The deeply racist nature of publishing in Britain can be seen in the fact that the BBC's first serialization of African-based fiction was Alexander McCall Smith's detective books set in Botswana, not those of any of the scores of African authors in Heinemann's AWS, not to mention other publishers.

There is a considerable difference between Britain and the United States, she maintained. Britain may claim it espouses multiculturalism and is a cosmopolitan society, but in reality

it is insular, it has great difficulty accepting outsiders, and in the case of blacks, smart black people who challenge the limits of Britain's multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Diversity may be held up as an ideal, but often those who embrace it don't change the system or achieve much. She mentioned three young blacks who had interned at Heinemann when she was there who are still unemployed today. Altogether there are still only three black editors among Britain's mainstream white publishers. Becky believes that compared to the United States, Britain is a much more rigid society in terms of class and racial boundaries, it remains a closed shop for blacks.

She wanted to leave me with one important message, that unless we build our own structures we won't go far as a people, that as scholars and publishers we have a duty to work together to educate and enlighten our people. As the saying goes, an educated mind is an enlightened mind.

I walked her to the Russell Square tube station. Had I brought my overnight bag I would have gone with her to Oxford, for I was expected to meet Cassandra, who arrived this morning to attend a conference on diasporas at Mansfield College, Oxford University.

By the time I got to the hotel, packed my bag, and took the underground for Paddington Station for the Oxford train, it was already after eight. I managed to get to Paddington a couple of minutes before departure of the train for Oxford. I had not been able to reach Cassandra on her cell and I was afraid if I got to the College after 10:00 p.m. I would not be able to get into the college, as the conference organizer informed the participants the College porter would be gone after that. The train took an hour and I told the taxi driver to rush to Mansfield College. It was five minutes before ten. Fortunately, we found the porter and he called Cassandra to let her know I had come. She met me downstairs her bleary eyes brightened with excitement. We walked to her room and left my bag. She was hungry. The porter gave us a map with names of restaurants. Unfortunately, none was open and the pubs had closed their restaurants, although they were packed with drinkers guzzling the frothy liquids as if there was no tomorrow. I have a hard time remembering that I used to love beer until I stopped drinking more than twenty-three years ago. I couldn't fathom it now, looking at these mostly young men and women lustily imbibing their sorrows and inhibitions away. Ah, the carefree pleasures of student life.

Fortunately, we found several American fast food joints open: KFC, Burger King, and McDonald's. We settled for Burger King because it had seats, KFC didn't, and McDonald's was a little further away. We laughed at the poignant irony as Cassandra bit into her double burger—her first meal in Britain from a hamburger joint where we would not be caught dead in Chicago! Walking back in the streets, still full of rowdy students and a few grownups pretending to be carefree youths with the help of alcohol, we imagined ourselves as students on a date. It was hilarious in its invented memories!

July 5, 2008

It was a lovely, restful day indeed. We were woken up by the cleaning lady, who brought fresh towels. As usual, we resumed our conversation from where we left it last night; I was still in shock that Cassandra's friend Maria's daughter, Nicole, had gotten married barely a month after graduating and had done so during a family trip to Las Vegas without telling her mother. What's wrong with these kids nowadays?, we feigned surprise. As

expected, the matter ended with a discussion of our own daughter, Natasha. Cassandra said she had sounded much better the last time she talked to her.

By the time we were ready to go and eat it was almost noon. Cassandra's conference was scheduled to start registration at 12:30, followed by the opening session at 1:30 p.m. So we had about an hour to kill. We strolled around downtown Oxford looking for a restaurant. The streets were already packed with students and tourists. This must be one of the few countries where a university campus is a tourist attraction, I remarked, as we passed groups of eager tourists listening to their tour guides. They looked in awe at the appropriately aged college and church buildings.

We found a cozy little restaurant on the ground floor of a hotel where they were still serving breakfast. Cassandra left me downtown to go to her conference. People who had not paid the registration fee were not allowed to attend. It was her conference, she said, relishing the fact that I was not welcome, "the big professor," as she loves to tease me. I couldn't find a seat on the makeshift outdoor café that had been cordoned off from the road where I had planned to sit and watch the crowds in front of the hotel. Instead, I found myself trudging to a couple of bookstores, but refrained from making any purchases.

For the rest of the afternoon and early evening I stayed in the tiny dorm room reading newspapers and doing some writing. Cassandra and I had agreed that we would meet at 9:00 p.m. after the conference dinner for us to go downtown for drinks and a meal for me. "Come meet my new friends," she said excitedly when she came to the room. We were joined by a group of six other people. "Be friendly," she said to me as we left the room. "I am always friendly," I protested. "No, you are not, I know you." She was right of course. I tend to be rather reticent with people I am meeting for the first time. I have actually become better over the years precisely because of her and Natasha's influence. They have socialized me into wearing a friendly face in front of strangers or people I really don't care for. Being an administrator has helped as well.

I struck up a conversation with a young man who studied at the University of Chicago and was now at Humboldt University in Berlin. He planned to return to do his PhD. in the U.S. after spending time in Vienna. I couldn't make out his race, as some would say in the U.S. Cassandra later told me he was Jewish. I thought he was East Indian. But who says East Indians cannot be Jewish? For goodness sake, there are black Jews, even if their Jewishness might be contested by European Jews—or rather white Jews, for there are black Europeans too. Oh, the madness of these classifications, the porosity of racial boundaries, the complex intersectionalities of culture, religion, ethnicity, and all identities.

None of the bars we stopped at was serving food at that time of the night. So I left the group, including Cassandra, to find a real restaurant. No more fast food tonight. I was lucky. There was a restaurant at another hotel that was humming with activity and delicious smells. I ordered shrimp pasta and enjoyed eavesdropping on the conversations around me. On my right hand side were two women ravishing their pizza and complaining about their jobs. To my left was a group of six or seven people split in a couple of conversations or so. The loudest was the lone black woman in the group who was talking to the person next to her, a man, about cheating boyfriends. With her large bangles and straight weave, she had all the gestures of a little drama queen. But she religiously avoided catching my eye.

By the time I returned to the pub, Cassandra and her conference colleagues were in full swing talking about some of the days' conference presentations. At every conference, there is the self-absorbed presenter who fancies his own brilliance and voice and goes way

over time. The man was from the DRC, married to a Russian woman, and he made sure everybody knew about this crowning achievement of his life. When the conversation broke into smaller conversations, I found myself speaking to the woman from Croatia who is doing her PhD at Trinity College in Dublin. Cassandra, who was sitting next to me on my left would occasionally join, especially when the Croatian woman started talking about the apparent differences in American and European academic cultures, specifically why both undergraduate and graduate students were taking longer to finish their degrees in American institutions compared to their European counterparts. She appeared reasonably well informed, but as we walked back I mentioned that I wondered about her when she asked Cassandra whether there was such a thing as an African diaspora. Maybe she meant something more profound but it did sound rather silly to me. Cassandra politely answered her and tried to draw me in. I agree with everything she is saying, I told the Croatian woman and the Jewish young man. Cassandra is right, I can't suffer fools. Fortunately, it was late at night and they couldn't see the expression on my face. It was also chilly and we were all in a hurry to get into the warmth of the building.

July 6, 2008

Lack of sleep guarantees a bad day for me. The cold Cassandra got from Argentina seems to be lingering and explodes at night in loud snoring. After twisting and turning for hours, I decided to go into the bathroom to read. By the time I went back to bed dawn had broken. It was clear my day was gone. I had planned to call and meet a couple of people in Oxford while Cassandra was attending the conference and leave for London in the afternoon. We agreed it was best if I left in the morning to get some rest.

The trip back to London was miserable as I kept dozing and bobbing my sleepy head up and down as the train roared to Paddington. Changing to the underground stations was equally unpleasant. When I got back to the hotel I jumped into bed and slept half the day away. I eventually dragged myself out of bed and took a long shower, which revived me sufficiently to feel hungry but not enough to want to do much more, not even to read the voluminous Sunday papers I had picked up from the lobby when I came in.

I had forgotten that today is Malawi's Independence Day until I got a text message from Jackie Kalipeni, who is living with Natasha, wishing me a Happy Independence Anniversary, and a blog from Steve Sharra commemorating the day. So much for patriotism, I reflected. In the space of a week I had forgotten the national days of the three countries I most identify with, Canada, the U.S., and Malawi on July 1, 4, and 6, respectively. In moments like these I realize I am not particularly wedded to any country, or that my nationalism is less about a specific African country and more about the fate and prospects of African peoples wherever they may be. Or are these rationalizations of a diasporic de-centeredness, a wannabe, flimsy cosmopolitanism, I wonder sometimes.

I found a nice French restaurant where I treated myself to a meat dish — lamb shank, which came in such a generous portion I was unable to finish it, having inadvisably eaten some bread and a smoked salmon salad beforehand. When I got back to the hotel I felt energized enough to read the day's papers and work on posting the eSymposium on the meaning and implications of the Obama phenomenon. I wrote a two-page introduction to the eSymposium consisting of seven commentaries by regular bloggers on *The Zeleza Post* and six responses, including a fine one by Cassandra. I have an uneasy feeling that

if Obama wins the presidential elections he will turn out to be a huge disappointment—it's amazing how fast he is sprinting to the so-called center of American politics. Why can't Democrats have a little more spine? This of course does not detract from the historic significance of his candidacy. He is a portent symbol of African-American entry into global relevance, and symbols matter. The quality of the contributions is generally high.

July 7, 2008

It's amazing how quickly time flies. I can't believe that this is my last full day in London. It couldn't have ended better. Beacon Mbiba, a Zimbabwean academic, agreed to meet with me at 1:00 p.m. He suggested that we meet at the London School of Economics, one of my old colleges that I hadn't visited since I left London in 1978. He suggested taking a bus or the tube. I decided to walk. It turned out to be much closer than I thought, especially on the way back when I didn't get lost: it was in fact less than ten minutes from the hotel.

There was some mix up in terms of the place we were supposed to meet. We managed to connect twenty minutes later. He took me to his office in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. He explained that he had been a lecturer on contract at LSE for several years before he got his current permanent position at the University of Oxfordshire; LSE allowed him to keep a shared office as an adjunct. He first came to the UK in 1996. He had been a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe. He left when both the economy and political situation began to deteriorate. He was wistful on how good conditions had been before then for middle-class professionals like him. As a lecturer, he had a decent salary supplemented by consultancies so that he and the family lived well. When he came to the UK, he worked as a Research Fellow for four years on the South Bank and later worked as a consultant for the Tony Blair Commission for Africa. It was later that he joined LSE.

Before discussing the Zimbabwean Diaspora in Britain he gave me a fascinating analysis of the Zimbabwean crisis. He was dismissive of the hypocrisy of the British government and pained by ZANU-PF's (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) descent into a quagmire that sent the country into a political and economic abyss. He attributed this in part to the failure of the party to renew itself internally and intellectually. It had failed to develop a new language of struggle that would have blunted western antagonism. If the land issue had been recalibrated in terms of new discourses on human rights rather than presented in the old rhetoric of national liberation struggle, the ideological conflict with Britain may have been contained. ZANU-PF failed to incorporate younger educated elements like him who had participated, as he had, in the liberation war but were too young to have risen to high positions in the liberation movement at the time of independence. The leadership of the liberation movement became a self-referential oligarchy increasingly divorced from its own supporters among the intelligentsia and the urban working and middle classes.

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) occupied this space. Given its origins in the trade union movement, workers gravitated to it, and so did disaffected members of the middle class and intelligentsia. Business elites also found the MDC attractive. But its Achilles heel was support from and the role of whites and the western powers led by Britain. This undermined the nationalist credentials of the MDC, a lethal failing in a

post-liberation society. The MDC made a mistake in regarding all enemies of ZANU-PF as its friends. Moreover, Morgan Tsvangirai is an indecisive, ineffectual leader. His seeking refuge in the Dutch embassy was a colossal blunder. And the recent revelation that he had not written or even read the letter published in *The Guardian* under his name showed poor political instincts and proved that he was being manipulated by Britain, which has its own nefarious interests in Zimbabwe.

At the core of the Zimbabwean crisis is a struggle for citizenship. A lot of focus has been placed on the white settlers. Their loyalty to the new Zimbabwe was not only questionable but they also controlled the economy, including agriculture, which the new government sought to address. But there is another dimension: within the African population itself there are millions who trace their origins to neighboring countries. There are 3 million descendants of Malawian migrants. When combined with those of Zambian and Mozambican origin, perhaps up to 55% of Zimbabweans are descendants of foreign migrant workers. Some, of course, have been in Zimbabwe for generations, but they are not regarded as indigenous by other Zimbabweans. In Zimbabwe you are not indigenous unless you have a rural home and a totem, otherwise you are *mbwidi*, a foreigner. Of course, those foreign Africans who have married locally and acquired a clan totem through their spouses are often regarded as indigenous. Conversely, "indigenous" Zimbabweans who are buried in the city are seen as behaving like Malawians and other foreigners.

In general, "indigenous" Zimbabweans live in the "tribal trust lands" and are staunch supporters of ZANU-PF, while the "foreigners" dominate the mining, white commercial farming areas, and the urban centers, and came late to ZANU-PF. The road to the crisis began with the imposition of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in 1989, which frustrated the new government's development agenda and ability to improve standards of living. Matters soon coalesced around the land issue. Mugabe had apparently delayed dealing with it in the 1980s, in part because of the restrictions in the Lancaster House Agreement. But he also tried to avoid undermining the political transition in South Africa. By the mid-1990s, the issue could no longer be avoided. The Conservatives were prepared to broker a deal with the Zimbabwean government. But matters changed when the Labor Party came to power in 1997 and reneged on Britain's Lancaster House commitments. In the meantime, political and social opposition was growing, which would coalesce into the formation of the MDC and the government's loss of the 1999 referendum.

This marked a watershed which brought the various elements of the growing crisis into the open. The loss of the referendum marked the re-entry of whites into national politics. They backed the MDC and campaigned heavily against the government. This angered ZANU-PF, which interpreted it as a break in the unwritten contract in which whites would be left alone economically as long as they stayed out of politics. Most farm workers in the mines and residents in cities also voted against the referendum. The supporters of ZANU-PF interpreted the loss as the fault of the white and black settlers. So when ZANU-PF began attacking both groups by threatening and curtailing their citizenship rights, the majority of indigenous Zimbabweans felt they deserved it and did not respond by supporting them. The economic crisis had not yet reached a critical point to generate widespread political opposition to ZANU-PF. This, of course, came before long.

Thus, Zimbabwe, as much as Southern Africa, with its prolonged history of migrant labor, has not adequately dealt with the question of identity, of what citizenship means for populations culled out of different racial, ethnic, and national origins. The Zimbabwean crisis will not fully be resolved until the country comes to terms with its migrant labor

history. The same is true of South Africa. It is disquieting that even among Zimbabweans in Britain, this issue is not discussed, he stated. In fact, in general Zimbabweans do not talk about the crisis at home. The challenge is not only to develop a new definition of citizenship but of patriotism beyond participation in the liberation struggle.

It is also important to maintain vigilance against the machinations of Britain. While there are no legal sanctions as such, except on the leadership, political sanctions have exacted heavy costs on Zimbabwe and affected foreign businesses and investment. Even academic research is not exempt. You won't get funded for a project in the UK unless it incorporates regime change, as the British and the West in general want the Zimbabwe economy to be brought to its knees to take advantage of reconstruction. The failures by Zimbabweans to work out their own solutions has opened up opportunities for outsiders to do so, to offer solutions predicated on the rhetoric of property rights, rule of law, and good governance that will promote foreign economic and political interests. Mbeki understands this, and that's why he refuses to follow western prescriptions on the Zimbabwe question. Having lived in Britain, he fully understands white racism and hypocrisy and is cautious in dealing with western powers. There are unwritten deals over Southern African liberation among the liberation movements. South Africa is also using Zimbabwe to fight, and as a mirror for, its own internal battles.

Beacon's analysis of Zimbabweans in the UK was equally intriguing and insightful. He talked about the patterns of migration, processes of diasporization, and the gendered dynamics of both. It is difficult to get accurate figures. Some papers report that there may be as many as 1 million Zimbabweans. He believes at most there may be about 25,000, including the white Rhodesians. It is particularly difficult to get an accurate measure of those who came after 2002, given increased visa restrictions. It has now become beneficial to the British government to downplay the numbers. In his own research he has used census figures, Home Office data on asylum seekers, hospital records, and his own surveys, which unfortunately do not capture the white Zimbabwean population. Data indicates that before the imposition of visa restrictions, for every one child born to Zimbabweans parents five were brought from Zimbabwe, and there were 5,000–6,000 births in 1999 and 12,000 in 2004.

Zimbabweans constitute one of the largest groups among the African Diaspora in Britain. Their visibility is magnified by their settler colonial history. Unlike, say, Ghanaians or Nigerians who like to live in predominantly black communities, Zimbabweans have been socialized to measure success by living in suburbs away from other blacks. Also, they tend to shop in upscale or white-owned establishments. He gave the example of a butchery run by a white man in Sutton where Zimbabweans flock. These Zimbabweans have contributed to the suburbanization of blacks in the UK, hence, their visibility in white spaces. Many of them soon discover, however, that the social economy of the white suburbs operates on different criteria from home, for example, when it comes to child care and social acceptability. Racism and lack of social networks forces many of them to come back to the black community, either physically or socially by spending more time there.

Zimbabweans in the UK came in different waves and they are concentrated in different locations and occupations. There are those who came in the 1980s, mostly from the war in Matabeleland, and those who came in the 1990s when the economy and political situation began to deteriorate, and those who have come since the crisis following the referendum. Generally, employers, again, because of settler colonial history, tend to show preference for Zimbabweans compared to many other Africans. The older the wave of

migration, generally, the better adjusted and more integrated they are. Many newer Zimbabweans find themselves increasingly crowded in the informal economy occupations, sometimes working for businesses run by other Zimbabweans. The most common Zimbabwean businesses included nursing homes before regulations were tightened in 2002–2004; cleaning companies; shops, including shabeens (he told me a fascinating story of his aunt); after-school colleges or after-school tuition academies; or to provide bogus registration for visas and house rentals, and money transfer operations.

In short, most Zimbabwean-owned businesses are in the care and social sectors. Beacon is interested in conducting a large project on African businesses to compare them to Afro-Caribbean businesses and Asian businesses. In the literature it is assumed that the size of the home base and networking determine business success or failure. Asian businesses have been relatively more successful than Afro-Caribbean businesses that tend to be limited to hair salons and beauty products. The degree of indebtedness is crucial in determining whether ethnically oriented products sell nationally and globally or are provided through wholesaling and supply chains. Clearly, diasporas are different, African diasporas are exploiting different opportunities than the Afro-Caribbean diasporas, and vice versa.

In examining the developmental contributions of diasporans to their home countries, Beacon believes it is important to focus on both ends of the spectrum. The diaspora's ability to help there depends on what it is here. In fact, as is clear from any analysis of the food business, imports of food from, say, West Africa affects agricultural production in West Africa as it does to patterns of food consumption and reproduction of identity in the diaspora.

Migration and diasporization are, of course, gendered processes. Unlike migration within Southern Africa and within and between countries, Zimbabwean migration to the UK has been female-led, he noted. There are twice as many female migrants as men. Women's mobility has been aided by globalization in general and the feminization of jobs available for migrants. Many of these jobs are in care services and are stereotyped as female and not seen as men's jobs. Racially, British society also seems less threatened by black women than by black men. Not surprisingly, few highly qualified Zimbabwean men come to the UK, the majority preferring instead to go to South Africa, the U.S., Canada, and so on. For those like Beacon who came here, the challenges are immense and deeply frustrating. Men working in these highly feminized care service jobs have developed self-deprecating synonyms and humor to hide their masculinist pain. So they will tell their friends they are going for their BBC shift—British Bottom Cleaners—in old people's homes, or they are employed in the dot com industry, i.e., they are care agents.

Beacon calls this migration *gender contracts*. The fact is that the Zimbabwean women who often bring their men are the bread winners, and the man's immigration status depends on the women. This subverts gender hierarchies and roles prevalent in Zimbabwe, which leads to high levels of violence and divorce. It leads to challenges in managing these cultural changes, and even conjugal relations where spouses work odd shifts. Also, there is a need to develop new strategies for managing domestic conflicts. Neither method from Zimbabwe nor those in Britain, which often entail calling the police, are effective or productive. He is interested in doing a comparative project on these challenges, looking at Zimbabwean families in the UK, U.S., Canada, and Australia, out of which more culturally sensitive and effective policies can be developed.

He concluded by discussing the role of diaspora children. He noted he has three children. Their attitudes toward Africa varies from ours. They do not relate to Africa, or

seek to go there only for sentimental reasons, but they tend to see opportunities for business. He has seen that happening in Ghana. There is need to conduct more systematic research on this: what is happening to our children in the diaspora? How are they different or similar to Afro-Caribbean children, especially in regards to the black boys' syndrome? He has observed that Zimbabwean youngsters who come here while already in secondary school perform very well, while those who start secondary school here perform poorly. Also, while many parents are highly educated, the levels of education fall in each subsequent generation.

These children will be crucial in building relations between Africa and the diaspora. We need to know more about how they are viewed in their home countries. On the broader subject of linkages, we need to investigate even the changing flows of remittances and the role of media and technology. He showed me a list of Zimbabwean websites and the important work they are doing to link Zimbabwe and the diaspora. This led to a discussion and appeal for us as African intellectuals to network to ensure we control knowledge production on Africa. I am amazed at how most of my interviews end on the same refrain, not simply for African intellectual collaboration, but the invocations of my U.S. location as a source of invaluable resources and potential personal assistance.

By the time we parted, more than four and a half hours later, it was raining outside and it had become too chilly for my summer shirt. I couldn't wait for the rain to stop, for Cassandra was coming tonight.

She came into the hotel room with a grin of self-satisfaction. "I made it!" she shouted. We were both impressed she hadn't been lost from the directions I had given her — she complains I am bad at giving directions and she is not good at following them. We were both famished. I had only a cup of hot chocolate and biscuits in the hotel room before I went to meet Beacon.

After checking a few restaurants in the vicinity we settled on the French restaurant where I ate last night. She agreed that the food was delicious. We ate leisurely and lingered there until 11:30 p.m.

France

July 8, 2008

Strangely, my alarm on the cell phone didn't go off. I got a call from the concierge that the taxi had arrived. It was 6:00 in the morning. Cassandra woke up as I rushed to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Before long, I was ready and kissed her good bye. At that moment I wished she were coming with me to Paris. We had of course discussed it in Chicago, but she said she could not do any more travel until her tenure file was completed. She plans to come visit me in Cuba. She leaves for Chicago tonight.

I snatched two papers from the lobby, *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times*, but the taxi driver would not let me read, for he seemed anxious to talk. He asked me about Chicago and how different it is from New York, the only American city he has visited. Then he talked about the Iraq War and how Mr. Blair had botched his legacy and he asked me what I thought of Mr. Bush. I had nothing kind to say. At that hour in the morning the traffic was light. We passed through the imposing grandeur of Buckingham Palace, then the elegant neighborhood of the well-heeled Knightsbridge, and cross the compact houses and office blocs on the way to Heathrow. I shuddered when I saw the fare—£65! That was nearly \$130 for a journey no further than the distance from my house to O'Hare. Even the niceness of the driver, a portly, middle-aged white man wasn't enough to disguise my surprise tinged with displeasure. The concierge had told me it normally costs £50. "Terminal 5 is further away from the other terminals," the driver tried to explain.

Terminal 5 is Heathrow's newest terminal. An imposing glass and steel hangar, it is spacious, bright and airy. Dozens of self-serve ticket counters are interspaced with expensive-looking cafés. Once you pass immigration, there are even more cafés and all those well-appointed designer stores for jewelry and clothing, and of course cameras and electronic goods and shoes and perfumes. As I wrote in the blog entry, "The Whiteness of Airports," modern airports resemble upscale shopping malls, havens for consumerism on the move. I bought a couple of magazines and helped myself to breakfast in a cheap restaurant with the gaudy theme and colors of giraffes.

Sandwiched in the middle seat on the plane, I buried myself in the two magazines. *Time* took less than a quarter of an hour to read. Whatever happened to this once venerable magazine? It is now so dumbed down. *The Economist* was more meaty and pleasurable to read, targeted at adults, even if largely to those of a conservative bent. The 40 minutes went very quickly. Checking through immigration was a breeze. The young white immigration officer didn't even stamp my passport as he gave me a smile. I am sure he would not have been so friendly if I were traveling on an African passport.

After arriving when I was about to leave Charles de Gaulle Airport, I found myself in a bit of trouble. I only had £25 with me and when I changed the money I got less than €25, even though the British pound is stronger than the euro. The difference had been pocketed as commission. But that was not the problem. The ATM machine refused my debit card. Instantaneously, I felt poor and worried about how I would get to the city. I

tried another ATM machine, same problem, contact your bank, it flashed. The old days of carrying travelers' checks suddenly looked surer and safer.

I took a chance and waited for a bus into town. The fare was €14. I had a little over €10 remaining. The driver explained the bus went to the center of the city from where I could take a taxi or the Metro. Instead of enjoying the views as we left the airport and passed through the outskirts of the city with its industrial office buildings and residential estates, including working-class suburbs in the distance, I was wondering whether the €10 in my pocket was enough to get me to my next destination. But even in my preoccupation I could not avoid the seductive view of this low-level city with its smart, compact buildings; endless cafés where, despite the rain, people ate their lunches facing the road rather than each other; elegant shops; narrow side streets; and historic monuments including the Eiffel Tower proudly overlooking this fabled city and its not-so-alluring imperial history.

The first taxi driver, who had an eastern European accent, I somehow concluded, said I did not have enough money for a taxi to the hotel. The next driver was more forgiving and he took me. He seemed anxious to practice his English, at once showing me his tattered dictionary of English phrases, and I humored him that he spoke good English indeed—a small price to pay for a broke passenger. I hadn't appreciated how narrow the streets were until we left the boulevard. Even though the ones we took were one way, we were caught in a traffic jam and snailed our way to the hotel in the Opera district. All the best shops in Paris are here, he said. I had read about the location when I did the booking, that the hotel was close to the main shopping district and cultural centers including the Opera and Lafayette Galleries.

The hotel itself was farther from the shopping and cultural heart of Paris than my tour book would seem to suggest. Certainly, it did not match the online brochures, nor for that matter did its three-star billing approximate that of the hotel I had just left in London, which had some character. This was a Best Western, which, even by the standards of Best Westerns in the U.S., was rather plain. Waiting for an hour in the lobby, I saw an ugly excuse for a lobby, which didn't help matters much. But the advertisement had been right in one respect: the manager was very friendly and when I called later after I had gone into my room to report that the Internet didn't work, he offered his computer. The room itself was very clean, and so was the bathroom. I was relieved. And the television had BBC World News, although the cable signal was lost for an hour or so.

I was tempted to explore the surroundings but decided to sort out my debit card problem first and then take a nap. My bank had put a freeze on the account because there were too many foreign transactions. They agreed to unfreeze it and I happily walked to the nearest bank after my nap and bought some take-away Chinese food. Seeing so many people, including those of African descent—both black and Arab, walking the narrow streets and patronizing the cafés, I had a feeling I would enjoy living in this neighborhood for the next nine days. Back in the room, I contacted Natasha and Cassandra and gave them my hotel contact information, switched on the TV to watch the BBC news, and enjoyed my take-away. The news was all about the G-8 leaders posturing on the world economy and global warming. Being the mouthpiece of a former colonial power, Zimbabwe featured high in the news reports. And there was all the hypocritical talk about Iran's nuclear ambitions and its threat to Israel, the only nuclear power in the region, following the successful testing of a long-range missile that could reach Israel. Any excitement I had been feeling quickly dissipated by the time I finished watching the news. Listening to an

interview of former South African apartheid President de Klerk attacking President Mbeki's handling of Zimbabwe, and his condemnation of Zimbabwe, gave me sympathy for all those misguided African nationalists—supporters of Mugabe. The unending drama of white solidarity and supremacy was so blatant, so troubling, and so predictable. I decided to call it a night with the BBC. Reading seemed so much more rewarding. I pulled out the two newspapers I had brought with me from the Thistle Bloomsbury Hotel. I relished the papers even more, knowing there would be no such luxuries at this hotel.

July 9, 2008

My first full day in Paris started quite well. After waking up, I went to a café around the corner and had a much lighter breakfast—a small cappuccino and a croissant—than I had become accustomed to in Berlin and London. It was frustrating not being able to connect to the Internet. The ever-friendly staff suggested that I go to McDonald's a few hundred meters away where there was free wireless Internet service. True enough, I was able to get online and wrote e-mails to the various contacts Giulia had given for appointments. And it was hard to resist reading online newspapers. Out of misplaced guilt I bought a cup of coffee as I surfed the net until the battery was about to die.

By 1:00 p.m., the two cups of coffee and croissant had disappeared and I felt hungry. Next to the hotel was a cafeteria that served a variety of dishes at reasonable prices, so I ate there. After lunch, I called Remy Bazenguissa, my main contact. He had kindly offered for me to stay at his home on my first day before I settled on a place to stay. I didn't feel like becoming an imposition and I love my privacy too much, so I avoided contacting him yesterday, which left him with the impression that I had just arrived. He gave me bus directions to the École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS).

I took a bus around the corner from the hotel. Bus 68 took us through some of the picturesque parts of Paris along Rue de Mogador and Rue Scribe to Avenue de l'Opera to Rue du Bac to Boulevard Raspail where I got off at the Notre-Dame-des-Champs Metro station. The banks of the Seine live up to their legendary reputation in the quiet beauty of the buildings and landscaping. The more the bus plowed its way through the wide boulevards and narrower streets, the more the architecture slid into a dull uniformity, the street-long stretches of five or six story limestone and concrete buildings, the ornate black iron bars along the windows and balconies, the cafés facing the streets.

Remy welcomed me as if we had met before. With his partially bald head and scruffy, graying hair and beard, rumpled shirt and jeans, he looked every inch the professor too busy for personal grooming. His friendliness was accentuated by his earnest efforts to speak English. Ever the intellectual, he would scratch his beard when he sought the right phrase or word to express his point. I envied him in that he could hold an academic conversation in English while I couldn't do the same in French. In fact, it seems to be the peculiar handicap of Anglophone scholars that we are confined to English in addition to whatever African languages we might speak, while Francophone scholars often have some proficiency in English. This, of course, reflects the global hegemony of English and the relative provincialism of French, but in the academic world this gives Francophone scholars a decided advantage since they can access knowledge and scholarship in both languages. There are moments I wish to hone my limited high school French. Reading is of course easier than speaking and I was able to make sense of a commentary on my academic life

and work in a recently published book by a French Africanist critiquing postcolonial African intellectuals, which Remy allowed me to look at while he left briefly for a dentist's appointment.

Before he left, Remy shared some thoughts on his research and the African diaspora. He began by noting that I was one of a few Malawians he had met. The first was a woman he met in South Africa who was extremely aggressive toward him when she realized he was from Congo-Brazzaville. It was as if by denouncing his foreignness, her claims to South Africa could be enhanced. He reminded her he was only in South Africa for a month conducting research and had no intention of living in the country. The second time he dealt with a Malawian was during discussions with Wolfgang Bender, the author of *Sweet Mother*, with whom he discussed Malawian music. He was astonished to find out the reach of Congolese musical influences and realized this music could no longer be considered Congolese but Pan-African since it was itself heavily influenced by the diaspora. We briefly discussed the dynamics of African diaspora musical flows.

Remy's current work focuses on two broad areas: first, African diasporas in France; and second, African politics, especially as it concerns civil war. I was of course more interested in the first topic, although I was fascinated by his brief discussion of the changing dynamics of violence in contemporary Africa, from centralized violence exemplified by coups, to generalized violence as evident in the rise of warlords and genocides. I told him about my classifications of war and conflict in twentieth-century Africa, outlined in my recently published co-edited collections, *The Causes of African Conflicts* and *The Resolution of African Conflicts*.

On the diaspora, he identified several issues that I hope to pursue with him later. He noted that there is an intellectual fight in France on how to define *African*, who constitutes the African diaspora, indeed whether it even makes sense to use the term. The problem has to do in part with the fact that the construction of the African presence in France has come under different regimes. There is the Africa of migration, which is recent compared to the Africa constructed during the colonial period and earlier. The discourse on the African diaspora has been in part fuelled by postcolonial migrations and racism, which erupted in the riots of 2005 about which he is editing a book.

Some people have adopted the term *black* to refer to the African-descended population. This form of racial representation is imported from the U.S. and is problematic in the French context. Some young people are representing themselves and fighting as blacks. But in France, discrimination is not simply directed at blacks. In fact, much of the discrimination is directed against Algerians and Arabs specifically, most of whom are from North Africa. In contrast, blacks are often seen as children to be protected. There is need to go beyond the concept of *black* in order to fully comprehend and deal with the realities of French racism and society.

Further complicating the picture is the existence of two distinct black groups: those from Africa and those from the Antilles islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The latter came out of histories of enslavement, the former out of colonialism. These different histories structure the identities and identifications of these groups with Africa and France. The sub-Saharan Africans have much closer relations with their North African counterparts. There is, of course, a history of collaboration and identification between elite sub-Saharans and Antilleans that gave rise to the negritude movement. But negritude did not operate at the lower levels involving the ordinary people of the two communities.

The growth of migrations, together with the intensification of racism in the 1970s, led to both new forms of representation and resistance movements. It was in this context that the new identities of French, *beur* (French-born North African), and black emerged. At the time, *beur* representation was strong and efforts were made to undermine black representation. The Left, in particular, was vocal in fighting the emergence of racial and communal identities. Even President Mitterrand and his wife and other prominent politicians sought to promote associations that undermined the development of black identity and representation. The failure to integrate the French-born children of African migrants led to growing dissatisfaction with the Left's policies. These children recognized that they were both French and different, that they were both black and *beur*. Thus, the term *black* became more relevant for them as a category of self-representation compared to their parents born in Africa. It is in this context that blackness is a relatively new thing, a new identity, which is being promoted by new organizations such as the Council for Black Representatives led by Patrick Lopez.

The youth exhibit complex identities from their complex experiences and practices. In the working-class neighborhoods where they are concentrated, youth organizations have increasingly become autonomous. Previously, the state tried to control these organizations by seeking to impose older people as overseers and for guidance. As pressure directed at or felt by the youth intensified, the youth assumed more control over struggles against marginality, which periodically turned violent. Originally, the groups were dominated by Arab youth, now sub-Saharan youths are more prominent.

Thus, the politics of identity in France are complicated given the varied histories of migration, targets of discrimination, and the global dimensions of French imperialism and colonialism. It is not just Africans whose identities were constructed by colonialism. People from Laos and Vietnam who reside in France were also colonized, but they constitute different diasporas. The question is what is the basis of that difference? These other diasporas tend to be excluded in the presentation of a France constituted of three groups—white, black, and *beur*.

As Remy was preparing to leave, he joked that he was becoming tired of working and living in France. He was interested in the Deputy Secretary's position at CODESRIA. I asked him why not the Executive Secretary, which Adebayo Olukoshi is vacating this year, and he said that was for Anglophones. He obviously meant it as a joke, but it betrayed the tensions in the African intellectual community between the Anglophones and Francophones. Failing that, he wouldn't mind coming to the U.S., but lacked sponsors. I teased him, how about Janet McGaffey, with whom he had co-authored a book on the Congo, and Mamadou Diouf, our mutual friend who had introduced us; and if he treated me well I could be of some help too, I teased him.

While Remy was away, I used a computer in the Center for African Studies conference room. There were three huge and stunning paintings mounted against the wall, all by the same Senegalese artist—two produced in 1988 and the other in 1989. Hardly had I started working on the computer when I was joined by Daniel-Pierre Fila, who also works at EHESS. It was clear Remy had talked to him about me, for he knew I was working on a project on African diasporas. We knew a few people in common, including Manthia Diawara, the distinguished Malian scholar, writer and film maker, and he is widely traveled across Africa. Almost as if he had overheard my conversations with Remy, he elaborated on some issues brought up by Remy. The conflict in France in terms of identities, he said, is between communitarian and republican ideas, between the myth of republican equality

for all citizens, and the reality of hierarchies among different communities. Africans are excluded and marginalized throughout French society from the academy and the arts to politics and the mainstream economy. Only in music is the African presence visible. In theater and film the first blacks to gain recognition were Bahari Songare and Marie Ndiaye, while in government the highest ranking black is Ramatoulaye Yade Zimet, who is responsible for international development. In order to maintain the myth of institutional access and mobility, they would pick and highlight one African in each sector. The Africans in France suffer not only from marginalization and severe economic challenges; they are also not well organized. They suffer from problems of conscientization. He suggested people to talk to and places to visit, including Presence Africaine, the legendary center of the African intellectual diaspora.

He made these suggestions when we had been joined by Cyril Musila, the person Remy had identified to assist me with my research. I explained to Cyril the scope of my research and thanked him for agreeing to work with me. He is a lecturer at the private Catholic University of Paris in the city and originally from the DRC. He and David-Pierre, from Congo-Brazzaville, lamented about the two Congos. They should have kept Zaire, for we are the real Congo, David-Pierre teased. Cyril and I exchanged contacts and made sure our text messaging worked. He promised to devise a comprehensive program of interviews and activities. I lamented the devaluation of the dollar, and we agreed to readjust his payment accordingly.

I happily boarded the bus back to the hotel and enjoyed a panoramic view of Paris. Reluctantly, I got another take-away for dinner and relaxed with San Selvon's acclaimed classic, *The Lonely Londoners*, on Caribbean migrants to the great imperial capital.

July 10, 2008

I went to a café near the hotel for breakfast. What I got was an excuse for breakfast—a croissant and coffee. Paris does make London look cheap. Those two items cost as much as the more ample English breakfast I enjoyed in London. Cyril had called to tell me he would come around 10:30 a.m. for us to go to the Presence Africaine and to meet Madame Diop, the wife of the late founder of this legendary institution of Pan-African letters. I waited for him in the lobby while reading *The Lonely Londoners* with its hilarious cast of characters: the working-class migrants from the Caribbean to the great metropole after the Second World War.

We took the Metro. It struck me as a tad bit cleaner than the London Underground—the air was a little less foul, the people a bit more congenial, and there were even kiosks selling fresh fruit, pastries, drinks, and cheap clothing accessories of scarves, ties, and jewelry. Africa's presence was everywhere, loud and visible; the black and brown faces, languages and fashions of West, Central, and North Africa; women in colorful *boubous*, Islamic dress, and ordinary French dresses; and men groomed in suits and ordinary workday clothes; and the younger women in tight jeans and revealing shirts; loose pants and T-shirts for the young men. From Chaussée d'Antin on Line 7, we changed at Chatelet where we took Line 4 for St. Michel Station. This is where the student protests of 1968 began, Cyril explained when we disembarked at St. Michel. We walked up the boulevard to the Sorbonne, a massive complex of learning, and one of Europe's oldest and most

prestigious universities. It is the center of the University of Paris, which has about fifteen universities, Cyril said. Presence Africaine was established in this area because it is the heart of French higher education and intellectual life.

The Presence Africaine bookstore is quite modest, but it is deeply conscious of its history, which is demonstrated with pictures on the windows and inside the store with posters of some of the great intellectuals and writers of the Pan-African world, and photographs of the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Books by the recently deceased Aimé Césaire are featured prominently. Cyril explained to the white woman at the counter that we would like to speak with Madame Diop. In the midst of this, Madame Diop walked in. A heavy-set, handsome woman, she greeted us politely but cautiously. The white woman explained our request and Cyril added a few introductory remarks, but she shook her head gently and asked us to come and see her another day for today she was rather busy.

Cyril tried hard to hide his disappointment and I smiled encouragingly that we could indeed try another day. Determined to retrieve something of the visit, we asked the white woman if she could recommend books on Africans in France, which she obligingly did. I bought almost €200 worth of books. We agreed that I would pay for them when we came to talk to Madame Diop and that they would be shipped for me to the U.S. Across the street is a bookstore for Gallimard, the famous French publisher of African books. But it was closed for lunch. We too decided to treat ourselves to lunch at a café a few minutes away. We both ordered salads. For the next two hours that we sat there, Cyril gave me a great overview of the history of the African diaspora in France.

He distinguished between two major waves: what he called the ancient and modern waves. He didn't know much about the ancient waves. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, France was largely a place of transit for Africans being shipped to the Americas. The role of the port cities of Bordeaux and Nantes in this trade was important and some Africans may have settled, but this is not well documented as far as he knows.

In the early twentieth century, new African migrations to France began. There were three groups of people: workers, soldiers, and students. The numbers of workers and students increased during the First World War. They were largely called *tirailleurs Sénégalais*, even if not all of them came from Senegal. A small group stayed and took up residence in France, while the majority returned home after the war. Of those who stayed, some retained their distinct identities and communities, but many were absorbed into French society.

The Second World War marked an important watershed following which the flow of Africans increased. Besides the numbers, there was a shift in attitudes. The mystique of France, of white colonial superiority, was destroyed by the German conquest and occupation. Africans played a crucial role in the liberation of France. These two realities, together with the growth of nationalism, not only opened France up to more African migration, but the African immigrants developed the confidence to demand more from France, to ask for greater rights than the previous groups of migrants. The intellectual elites who had developed *negritude* began to articulate demands for racial equality and colonial autonomy and even independence. As more Africans came to stay, they began to establish new communities in the country, something that previously had not been easy to do.

Independence marked a new period that saw the return of colonial settlers, especially from Algeria, and continued growth in African immigration, and an expansion in the countries of origin of the African immigrants. Up to the 1970s and 1980s, immigration

from Central Africa had increased. The shift to slower migration rates coincided with the tightened immigration law in France, the result of which was growth of illegal migration. He could bear personal witness to these changes.

Cyril came to France in 1989 to study. When he arrived, there were only six blacks at the Catholic University. Two years later, there were 50. As the number of African students increased, general attitudes about them, mostly cloaked in negative stereotypes, changed completely. The students generally performed well. Encouraged by an Ivorian student, Cyril became involved in African student politics on campus and joined the student union, through which he met the director and could push an African agenda including issues concerning student visas. In his second year, he became president of the African Students' Association and, after his Master's, he became a lecturer. One of his responsibilities as president was to help African students and other young people to understand the French system.

From 1993–94, the situation became increasingly hard for African students when Charles Pasqua, the immigration minister, tightened conditions for foreign students who were now only allowed to work after being in France for a year, and only for twenty hours a week. This made it hard for these students to support themselves. The visa application process was also tightened; students and other immigrants now had to show financial proof that they had sufficient funds to support themselves. This resulted in declining numbers of African students coming to France. Now the numbers are quite low. Not only did many African students in France leave for the U.S. and Canada to escape rising racism, those from the Francophone countries who would previously have thought of studying in France began to prefer Canada and the U.S.

The demographic profile of the new migrants from Africa has changed in its age. New migration is dominated by youths. African diaspora youth cultures are evident in the leisure and fashion industries. Unlike the migrants of previous generations who were workers, the youth are heavily involved in business and trade. Their lives and businesses are linked largely to music, and cultural production more generally. Many have established restaurants, discos, and bars, and they are innovating systems of financial flow to Africa.

Managing the relationship between the different waves and generations of Africans in France is difficult, for they each have their own diasporic traditions and places. It is not easy to develop a common agenda. However, several organizations have been created to do so. One is the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN), an umbrella organization of African diaspora organizations, which seeks to follow the tradition of African-American civil rights associations. In fact, there is a French coalition for Obama, who is expected to visit in August. Then there is Cimade, which works on immigration issues. In the meantime, each sector of diaspora society has its own organizations and networks. The students have built their own networks in the universities.

Cyril thinks that it is rather unfortunate that while diaspora groups have become very active and have managed to create spaces for themselves to meet and talk, few of them work proactively and effectively with the wider French society and they rarely seek to penetrate the key institutions and influence policymakers among whom decisions are made. In short, diaspora associations tend to talk amongst themselves. He believes firmly, as he learned as a student leader, that the way to be influential is to get into the circles where decisions are made at all levels, from parliament to the media.

I was interested to hear his views on what I consider the other two branches of the African diaspora in France, the Antilleans and North Africans. He stated that relations

between the Africans and Afro-Caribbeans are becoming easier than in the past. In the past, relations were poisoned by Antillean accusations and resentment that Africans sold their ancestors into slavery. The Antilleans also tended to feel they were French, with little to do with Africa. The fact that they are French citizens simply reinforces this lack of an immediate identification with Africa and Africanness. Some even showed racist attitudes toward Africans, asking them what they were doing in France, leaving their independent countries.

Relations have improved beyond the elite collaborations of negritude. The reasons for this have to do with the changing political situation that they need to confront together. It has become increasingly clear to the Antilleans that they face a similar set of challenges with the Africans. This has been facilitated by the adoption of a common language, a common vocabulary of victimhood, in which both slavery and colonialism are discussed as the root causes of the continued racism that they face in French society, which engenders their marginalization in all walks of life—politics, the media, and business. This is a discourse shared among both the elites and common people in these communities.

Spearheading this discourse has been Christiane Taubira, a politician, who has highlighted French culpability for slavery and colonialism and the need to see the two groups as victims of these historical crimes. Also facilitating the growth of this common consciousness and collective struggle are the violent tensions in the suburbs caused by the peoples' marginalization, joblessness, and vulnerability to violence at the hands of the state. Cyril calls this victim collaboration. The challenge, as he sees it, is to transform victim solidarity to something more positive that will bring more progressive change. In other words, the African diaspora needs to turn from victims into actors for transformation. A lot of initiatives are in fact underway that indicate such a transformation may be taking place.

As for the North Africans, who tend to be collectively called Arabs, relations are close. When they see black Africans they call them cousins, a recognition that they are all related, coming as they do from the same continent. Also critical are the common experiences the youths of both groups share in the suburbs, from school to the job market. The third connector is Islam. The black and Arab youths are quite particular about Islam and they respectfully observe Islamic traditions and festivities such as Ramadan. Islam has become a critical space for them to build their identity and it provides a discursive language about their common identity. State antagonism and pressures against Islamic practices simply serve to bring them closer together.

France is confronted by a deep dilemma. At heart is how to deal with and construct a multicultural society, how to balance *laïcité* (secular society) and Catholic heritage, the claim that this is a secular society when Catholicism is deeply entrenched in the national culture. It is in this context that Islam poses a problem; it challenges France's self-identity. French foreign policy and the Iraq War have fed into the struggles over Islam; between French racism and Islamic fundamentalism. For some of the disaffected Muslim youths who feel they have nothing to lose, fundamentalism serves as a way to gain recognition and make a statement. Cyril claimed fundamentalist groups tend not to include black youth. His explanation was that there is a cultural predisposition in sub-Saharan Africa for tolerating religious difference and against extremism. African Muslim youth are Muslim but remain culturally African. He gave the example of three Congolese youths that he talked to who converted to Islam. They were attracted to Islam because of, first, curiosity and the desire to experience something new; second, reading the Qur'an made them learn lessons about community and themselves that were missing in their previous Catholic

faith. For them, the complementarities with African culture proved most attractive. Each group, he suggested, brings parts of its cultural identity to Islam—the Africans, tolerance; the Arabs, extremism. I found that explanation rather simplistic for its questionable racial and cultural essentializations.

The complex issues concerning the diaspora not only pose challenges for the French state and society, but also for scholars. Many of the discourses among the African diaspora communities do not circulate in the transnational circles of white French scholars, who, unlike African scholars, have limited access to these communities and their discourses. It is important to stress the role of violence perpetrated and experienced by the youth, the problems they have with the police, and how they have developed their consciousness and thinking, in short, their discourses.

I was curious about the educational prospects and problems facing the African diaspora youths. Cyril said racial discrimination was widespread in high schools. Most of these youths are oriented to technical studies by the time they turn 15 or 16 so that very few of them go to university. Eighty to ninety percent of the blacks doing PhDs in French universities are coming from Africa, not born here. Those who go beyond high school attend technical schools. Most, of course, don't even get that far, and many drop out of high school. This would seem to be part of a deliberate strategy to reproduce a population that is too preoccupied with the emergencies of daily life and with consumption to think critically and creatively for itself and transform society.

Unlike, perhaps, in the Anglophone countries, parents in France do not send their kids back home for education because education in their home countries is often poor. In fact, parents from Francophone African countries who can afford it send their kids to France. Black parents have developed other strategies of resistance. These include establishing parallel programs in their kids' schools, providing extra classes for their kids at home or in associations, or sending their kids to schools in Britain, Canada and the U.S. Only middle and upper-class parents can send their kids abroad. This ensures that their kids acquire new language and transnational capacities, which are highly valued in France. He noted how French-educated African intellectuals, such as Mamadou Diouf and Achille Mbembe, are unable to get jobs in France and leave for the United States, but when they come back for visits are very desirable and in great demand. He gave his own case, how his university was impressed that he was invited to attend a conference and give lectures in London. It was for this reason that he struggled hard to work for an international organization. It took him four years to get into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which posted him to Kigali. People without international experience working for organizations such as the OECD, the EU, the UN, and international NGOs, have greater difficulties making it in France. The diaspora is increasingly orienting their kids to acquiring the highly desirable capital of transnational experience, which is further transnationalizing the elite segments of the African diaspora in France.

I spent part of my evening at McDonald's surfing the net, responding to e-mails and reading papers. I was surprised that the place was full of young people and even families. With all these cafés, why would they want McDonald's, I wondered. Perhaps it was the prices, at about €5, a meal was still a bargain in Paris. Or maybe it was to taste a bit of America. I ordered a chicken salad, my second one for the day. I promised myself to stop by a nearby café later in the night for a proper meal. But I became too engrossed in *The Lonely Londoners* to leave the hotel again. The characters are becoming even more

outlandish, their London desperately alienating, far from the idyllic metropole of their migrant and diasporic imaginations.

July 11, 2008

I had two scheduled interviews today, first with Remy at 2:00 p.m. and then with his wife, Kadya, at 3:30 p.m. I was keen to pursue several issues not fully explored in my first discussion with Remy and to learn of Kadya's research—which Cyril said is partly on Brazil—and the comparisons she might draw between Afro-Brazilian and Afro-French diasporas. Unfortunately, the interview with her did not take place.

I arrived at the Notre-Dame-des-Champs bus station earlier than I had anticipated. For the next 40 minutes, I walked around to see the place and get a pen. I was amazed how difficult it was to find such a simple thing as a pen. I had tried the shops next to the hotel yesterday without much luck. This time I was determined to find one. I have run out of all the pens I brought with me. I write all my daily entries by hand. Five minutes before I had to be at Remy's office, I finally found a small shop that sold pens, and I bought two. With a sense of accomplishment I rushed to Remy's office and I was there a minute before 2:00. I shouldn't have rushed. It was another 35 minutes before Cyril turned up. He was apparently delayed on the Metro, which made two unscheduled stops underground. It must have been scary, I commented to Cyril when he came panting. He agreed it was. Did they explain what the matter was? No. Remy was less charitable. Africans always find an excuse for being late, he said, as we waited for Cyril to join us in his office.

The arrangement this time was that Remy would speak in French and Cyril would translate. Occasionally, Remy would lapse into English when he felt he was not being translated correctly or forgot, with the excitement of an idea, that Cyril was there to translate. And on a couple of occasions Cyril had to leave to receive or make calls and Remy continued talking.

He elaborated on African migrations to France. Historically, he argued, there is the question of the nature of the migrations, free or forced, and the nature of the African presence, visibilities and invisibilities. Unlike in the Americas, African migrations to France on a large scale have been free and recent. Africans began to be visible on the French landscape in the 1920s, although networks of migrations had developed from the late nineteenth century among Senegalese, Malians, and Mauritians. The port cities of Marseilles, Nantes, and others were the first places of stabilization for African immigrants. Port workers became important in organizing migration networks from West Africa. The growth of these networks reflected the fact that in some communities, migration to France increasingly became a tradition, a kind of rite of passage to manhood, an integral part of the reproduction of masculinity.

The First World War and the interwar period saw the growth of African migration as workers, soldiers, and students arrived. It is important to understand the political context of these migrations. They were tied to the question of citizenship. In the French colonies, the population was divided into citizens and subjects. The assimilated Africans enjoyed citizenship rights, including the right to vote, as was the case in the four communes of Senegal. They could easily move back and forth between France and the colonial territories. One avenue for the subjects—*sujets*—to become citizens was by fighting for France.

Joining the colonial army became an important avenue of acquiring citizenship in the empire. That's what Andre Matsoua from Congo did; he was a subject who fought in the colonial Rif War in Morocco and subsequently became a citizen.

The emergent elites among the African migrants began creating associations to discuss political issues and advance their interests in the colonies and metropole. Among them were leaders like Senghor and Matsoua. Those based in France addressed the issues of black people based in the country. Paris was also a major center where Pan-Africanists from elsewhere came, which reinforced the activism of the Francophone elites. These elites articulated their activism against French colonialism in the name of French citizenship, that they were making claims as citizens. At the time, this was an expression of elite nationalism since they were aware and, in fact claimed, that not all Africans in France were citizens, especially among the workers and domestics.

The centrality of the Second World War in Franco-African history and migration cannot be overstated. The war brought a new political context, a new logic of African migration and claims in France. The liberation of France from German occupation was undertaken from Africa. Free France had its capital in Brazzaville in 1939–1942, and from 1942 in Algiers. One of the key figures in the exiled government of Free France was Félix Éboué, the governor of Chad, a black man from French Guyana whose daughter later married Senghor. It was under his watch that the troops of Free France were organized led by General Philippe Leclerc, whose division liberated Paris. The Second World War marked the deterritorialization of France. This provided a new context for development of the African diaspora. France was indebted to the colonies for its very survival and liberation. General De Gaulle (he gave himself the title, he had been colonel, Remy said, to enhance his authority) was very conscious of what France owed the colonial people (he apparently asked that African leaders be specially invited to his funeral).

In 1944 came the Brazzaville Conference, which sought to build a new relationship between France and the colonies—the French community. This marked an important shift in French mentality and policy. Before that only the four communes in Senegal and Libreville had representation in France. Central Africa had been under the control of disastrous concession companies. Now the net of citizenship was cast wider, and greater efforts were made to build the colonial states in the proposed community. It was in this context that the migrations of students expanded and migrations from Central Africa began in earnest. The students were expected to be the functionaries and custodians of the new states and many returned after their training. But the deterritorialization of empire accelerated by the war facilitated the circulation of African elites not only between Africa and France, but also among the African and Asian colonies of Laos and Vietnam; in the process intermarriages took place. In the meantime, the migration of workers continued, indeed accelerated, as France sought labor for postwar reconstruction.

If migrations during this period followed the colonial logic of deterritorialization of the empire, from the 1970s, as France tightened its immigration policies, a new logic of globalization emerged which led to the transnationalization of Francophone migrations beyond France. Prior to the 1970s, it was easy for Francophone migrants to enter and stay in France. Their status was regularized by French embassies in Africa or upon arrival here. As France tightened its doors, more people began to migrate to other European countries. Also, more migrants from the Francophone countries increasingly came on their own sponsorship to stay, rather than as students to study. A growing number sought political asylum. Finally, there was the growth in illegal immigration. Clandestinity was

a response to the tighter immigration regime, both as a curse and a strategy. Until 1981, the leading nationalities among Africans in France were Senegalese and Malian. Now the Congolese, previously negligible, have joined the other two countries. Thus, shifts in French immigration law and conditions have affected African migrations. Not only have the migrations continued to grow, even if the patterns have changed, Francophone migrations are now transnationalized beyond France. Remy insisted that this is a clear demonstration of the agency of African migrants.

On relations between Africans and Antilleans, he elaborated on why there is relatively little mixing outside the old elite negritude circles. Until recently, many Africans came as students and middle class migrants, which differed from the Antilleans, who were mostly working class. Also, the importance of France to the status of the two groups in their countries of origin varied, which led to different investments in a French identity. For the Antilleans, the higher their standing is in France, the higher their status in the Antilles; while for the Africans, even if their status in France is low, they are still somebody in their countries of origin. Also coming out of a history of slavery, some Antilleans do not embrace the negative identity associated with slavery so they have a greater propensity to emphasize their Frenchness. The relationship between Africans and Antilleans has also developed in the context of state apparatuses of control. Africans often encounter Antilleans as policemen or Metro workers. Both groups tend to seek relationships with and to learn lessons from African Americans and the U.S. civil rights movement.

I pressed him a little more on what he had said in our first meeting on the discourses and debates on the African diaspora in France. He identified two problems in France making it difficult to talk of the African diaspora. France finds it difficult to talk of the race problem as a result of its republican traditions of universalism. This doesn't mean that discrimination is necessarily ignored, but the explanation does not often directly point to race, as such. Increasingly, scholars are beginning to talk of race, to think of the importance of race in French society and the need to address it analytically. Many of them, including Pap Ndiaye who recently published the acclaimed book, *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française*, have been influenced by American studies. Ndiaye is an expert on American studies. For such scholars, France is provincial and needs to be internationalized. Others, of course, argue that following U.S. scholarly trends is not internationalization.

A strange twist on the discourse of race is reflected in the attempt by some scholars and politicians to make whiteness and blackness—white and black racial attitudes—equivalent. Before the riots of 2005 in France, there was a big debate among white French intellectuals and political leaders on black anti-white racism. This followed two incidents. First, when black kids broke a strike by white school kids, robbed the white students of cell phones, and held a Jewish student hostage. The second incident involved claims by a Jewish woman that she had been attacked on a train by blacks. Blacks were accused of being anti-Jewish, of harboring racist attitudes. It turned out the woman was mentally unstable and had invented the story. This caused enormous embarrassment to all those who had been accusing blacks of being racist. Increasingly, race has even become a subject of humor. Indeed, the expression of racist attitudes, which previously would have been frowned upon, has become permissible. The rise and relative electoral success of Jean-Marie Le Pen's party speaks to that reality.

The second problem in discussing African diaspora rests on the very conception of the term *African*. Under colonial rule, people had a multiplicity of identities—racial, ethnic,

and increasingly territorial. Under the logic of the color line, the term *African* implied distancing from other more primary identities, Africanness became an acquired identity of alienation from other identities. In other words, as an African you were a foreigner in your own country and in France you became a foreigner as well. By this time, Cyril had gone out and I could not quite follow Remy's argument in his belabored English.

We were on firmer footing when he discussed the tropes under which African diasporas in France are studied. The phenomenon of the diaspora is studied under the topics of migration and integration. Most analysts tend to map out the patterns and processes of African migration into the country and examine the challenges the immigrants face in achieving economic and social integration. In more recent years, following the collapse of working-class structures and protests—the decline of the Communist Party, for example—it is argued that integration has become more difficult. Cultural issues are discussed under the rubric of social integration and the pressures immigrants face to integrate into French culture. It is a discourse that right-wing politicians like Nicolas Sarkozy seek to promote. But it would be too simple to blame it all on the collapse of socialism. Many African immigrants, especially those from Algeria, fled socialism at home and were already predisposed to right-wing political ideologies.

The expressions of diasporic identities are complicated by transnational and generational dynamics. It is now common among Congolese from the DRC to identify themselves not so much by their countries of residence, but by the cities where they live and derive, or wish to derive, a particular status—Mwana Paris, Mwana London, and Mwana Brussels. In terms of generations, the children of African immigrants have no intention, like their parents, to go back to Africa. Consequently, their sensitivities and preoccupations are quite different. For one thing, they are more sensitive to race and liable to regard themselves as black.

We concluded with a discussion of a recent conference held in early June on Black France. Remy gave a paper on how Africans became black, which he promised to send me when it is completed. The two are not the same, he stressed. He was amused by the fact that there were only two blacks at the conference from France, he and an Antillean scholar who wanted to teach him how to be black. All the rest of the black scholars came from the U.S. and the rest of the French scholars were white. So it was essentially a dialogue between white French and black American scholars—Black France itself was largely missing. The American scholars talked of the black representation of France in terms of the experience of African-American émigré artists, from Josephine Baker to Richard Wright.

During the coffee breaks, many of the American scholars would corner him, seeking validation, are you alright with what we were saying?, they would ask. They knew they were speaking about a past that was not a crucial part of Black France, let alone of contemporary Black France. They would overcompensate by posing the questions of action and relevance: what should be done, why aren't the people of the *banlieues* (suburbs) here? They would not ask the most obvious question, why this was a celebration of black America cheered on by white French intellectuals? Their Black France was an idyllic space of jazz singers and émigré writers. One African participant noted that Wright had relations with Africans in Paris, which were negative; he was greeted with uncomfortable silence. Part of the challenge facing black French academics is that they write mostly in French and they are not known in English intellectual circles. Also, white French circles are more familiar with American studies—from gender studies to postcolonial studies to whiteness studies. Interestingly, while there was a paucity of black French academics, the conference

was packed with young black people. Clearly, this shows their hunger to understand their black identity.

By the time we finished, we had gone way past the time scheduled for an interview with Kadya. It was rescheduled to Monday morning at her home. I briefly went back to the Center's conference room to print two papers for Remy, one, my article, "Rewriting African Diasporas," that he had requested, and the other, my blog post, "The Postcolonial Uprising in France," on which I wanted his opinion. Earlier, while waiting for Cyril, I had met a young Comorian student studying at the Sorbonne. He is working on international negotiations, how African countries are often poorly represented at bilateral and multilateral forums. I asked if he could write a short piece on this subject that I could post on my website. He seems quite familiar with some of my work, even referring to the so-called Zeleza-Mbembe Debate manufactured in the pages of the CODESRIA Bulletin. He mentioned that Mbembe had been here recently and he and his colleagues had organized an event for him. Would I be willing for something similar to be organized, he asked. I agreed if time allowed. He has worked with Howard Wolpe in Washington, D.C., and his English is good, and he is a fluent Swahili speaker. I practiced my awful Swahili and French on him, to his obvious amusement.

Although it was already after 5:00 when we left the Center for African Studies, Cyril had the bright idea to take me to see "the real African Paris," as he called it. We took the Metro, changing at Chatelet to Chateau Rouge. Even before we arrived, the closer we got the more evident the African "invasion" became as hordes of Africans boarded the train at each stop. Getting out of the station was like arriving in any African city—Nairobi, Blantyre, Accra—you name it. There were Africans and Africa everywhere: street kiosks and vendors selling everything from vegetables to clothes; and there were the shops screaming their African names and wares, from music and video stores to hair salons and beauty parlors; to grocery stores filled with dried foods, including fish and meats; restaurants and bars; overflowing clothing and electronic stores; and export and shipping services. Everywhere I turned the sights, sounds, smells, and colors of Africa were palpable, indeed overwhelming. Except for the characteristic Parisian architecture, this was an African neighborhood where people spoke African languages and heavily accented French; walked the streets and drove with a possessive confidence; where whites and their whiteness intruded intermittently, almost apologetically, at a couple of bars and cafés. We stopped by a few places where Cyril tried to set up appointments for tomorrow.

Satisfied with my shocked reaction, he proudly took me to a Congolese restaurant. The raucous joyfulness of the place was unmistakable. Besides a few couples feasting on each other's company, the tables were filled with mixed groups of people celebrating the beginning of the weekend with ample supplies of drink, food, and laughter. At one table, they were talking about politics back home, Cyril explained, at another they were discussing the French economy. The patrons at both these tables were middle-class people, Cyril said, doctors and accountants. Together with working-class people—hotel cleaners and petty traders—they were all united by the conviviality of familiarity, the sociability of diaspora life and memories. There were two TVs mounted on two walls and showing music videos, while a different CD was playing from the bar, and the red-and-white room was adorned with masks and portraits of Jesus. It was a *mélange* of images and conversations talking to a diaspora trying to feel at home.

But no amount of excitement visiting a restaurant that proclaimed its Africanness so brazenly could hide the fact that this was a poorly run operation. There was only one

waiter. The poor young woman, barely five feet in height, weighed down by multicolored braids, jumped from one table to the next, one order to another, her face an expression in controlled frustration. It took almost three quarters of an hour before she graced us with her presence, an hour before we saw the food. By then I could barely contain my annoyance. I had only had an omelet and a cup of coffee the whole day. Thankfully, the food was delicious — roast pork, fish, greens, plantains, and cassava. We ate in contented silence. We were ready to forgive the restaurant when another problem cropped up. They didn't take credit cards and I didn't have enough cash, nor did Cyril have any money on him. The waitress allowed us to leave Cyril's briefcase while we went to look for an ATM machine. How could they run a business like that, we both wondered. The waitress smiled with barely disguised surprise when we returned. The restaurant didn't use credit cards, she explained because people cheat. I almost laughed. By the time I got back to the hotel it was almost 11:30 p.m. Yearning for home can be costly at times, I reflected on the bizarre experience at the restaurant. But I couldn't take the vibrancy of the African Paris I had seen out of my mind.

July 12, 2008

I didn't feel like returning to Chateau Rouge today to talk to the business people Cyril had lined up. Having gone to bed so late I woke up feeling not fully rested. So I contacted Cyril to postpone our visit until tomorrow. For the first time I decided to sample the breakfast in the hotel restaurant. It wasn't any more expensive than the omelet I had yesterday. There were cold meats, breads, cereals, yogurts, juices, boiled eggs, fruits, and coffee. There were three couples; all sounded European and seemed like tourists.

The weather was unusually chilly. That gave me an incentive to go shopping for a coat. For the next two hours or so I ventured in and out of men's shops near the hotel. They were all packed and people were snatching clothes up like there was no tomorrow. The prices were outrageous. In the five-story department store where I ended up, each floor sold brands of some of the most famous designers for shirts, casual wear, suits, and shoes; all with prices to match. I found a stylish, casual white coat which I was tempted to buy until I was told the price was a staggering €1,250. I quickly put it back where it belonged. I tried a few more coats, increasingly more out of curiosity; my picks were either too long or too short. A Malian saleswoman tried her best to find one that fit me, but when she couldn't she gave me a scornful grin. At least I chatted with her a little bit. Another saleswoman, white, wore a stern face when she found out I didn't speak French and she didn't seem too keen for me to try one of her coats. I quickly left her alone. A friendlier white salesman let me try several, including a suit, and didn't seem too disappointed when I balked at the price. I discovered French sizes were different from American ones—the numbers were much larger which made me feel rather overweight, French size 41 for American size 16 shirts; French size 52 for American size 40 jackets.

By the time I left the department store the sun had come up and it felt a little warmer, so I didn't feel too bad that I hadn't purchased a coat. I walked around, each street and the buildings blur into each other. It was as if one architect had built the entire city. The original charm wore off with this unyielding monotony. Only the churches looked different, even then all the churches looked similar save for size. Sauntering back to the hotel I bought myself two magazines and stopped by a Japanese restaurant for a light evening meal.

It was a blissful evening, with little writing and lots of reading. I finished reading the magazines I had brought from London and devoured the new ones before completing *The Lonely Londoners*. Evocative writing; there is a sentence that runs for nine pages without punctuation covering multiple characters and scenes and without losing a beat, quite incredible. But the characters remain rather disembodied caricatures, doomed to unrelenting gloom. *The Economist* and the BBC television news were full of reports and commentaries on the new Mediterranean club Sarkozy dreams of building between France, and by extension, the EU, and the countries of the southern Mediterranean, including North Africa. I was tempted to write a blog. Forty-three heads of state are expected to meet tomorrow. What are the implications of this for the African continent? In the end the idea of a blog dissipated from a lack of any real spark. It's the same old story of Europe trying to order and reorder the world according to its whims, and leaders from the former colonies come running when the master calls. It is quite sickening.

It occurred to me that during these research trips I don't do much in the evenings besides writing and reading. The only outing is dinner. But the solitude of these evenings after spending the day talking to people or seeing places is infinitely rewarding. My mother was right: I enjoy my own company; at heart I am a loner who is rarely lonely.

July 13, 2008

Cyril kept me waiting at the Chateau Rouge station. I had left my cell phone at the hotel and so couldn't reach him. Had something happened or was he simply being his late African-time self? For the next three quarters of an hour I watched the parade of people, mostly Africans, outside the station where we had agreed to meet. They were going in all directions, from and into the station, across the street, men and women and children, walking alone or in groups, couples or single parents with children, women pushing prams, a few travelers hauling suitcases, many others carrying plastic bags of all colors, and vendors selling belts, sunglasses, watches, fruits, and popcorn. It was a Babel of languages from the crowd whose waves ebbed and flowed. Some looked bewildered and dejected; others purposeful and serious; several laughed and smiled at their private jokes or personal fortunes.

Occasionally, my attention would be caught by a particular scene, the mother holding hands with her teenage daughter; the man with a baby strapped to his chest as his wife walked freely ahead of him; a young black man helping an old white woman hunched on her cane; the woman in a flowery tight dress talking anxiously on her cell phone while looking impatiently at her watch; the man with dark glasses perched on his forehead and a large silver necklace who was accompanied by two white women; the man with a toddler in matching clothes; the three chatty teenagers wearing oversized wigs, one of straight hair, another of braids, and another of long, curly hair; the fat Arab woman who chomped two bags of popcorn and picked her teeth and the birds that fluttered around her to eat her scraps; the couple in their Sunday best carrying what looked like Bibles; the man in Islamic dress passing leaflets which most seemed to ignore. I wondered what stories each carried with them, the journeys they had traveled to this moment, and the journeys to be traveled awaiting them in their diasporic lives.

But even the parade became tiring, so I decided to give Cyril fifteen more minutes. I decided to buy some fruits, a succulent mango and some bananas, and then I walked

down the street looking for roasted peanuts. The groceries seemed to store only raw peanuts. I was struck by the racial pattern of shop ownership. Many of the dry goods groceries seemed to be owned by Asians, the butcheries by Arabs, and the clothing, music, and video stores by West and Central Africans. What distribution claims lay behind this, I wondered. I ended up buying raw peanuts.

When I walked back I saw Cyril and when he saw me he waved, grinned, and walked toward me. This time he blamed it on reduced services on Sundays. I sent you several messages while in the Metro, he excused himself. I just nodded with a wan smile. The fake smile folded once he told me that we had no specific appointment. We would try our luck with whoever agreed to talk to us. Fortunately, we met and interviewed two interesting businessmen.

Nianghane Samba is a 78-year-old man who owns a clothing store. It is a sizeable store packed with bales of brightly colored cloths beloved of African women, and a small rack of tailored clothes. The cloths were mostly from the Netherlands. The ones that caught my eye were batiks from West Africa. The latter were cheaper than the former, to my surprise. Samba came to France in 1948. He has been based in Paris ever since, although he has traveled widely on business to many countries in Africa, Europe, and Asia.

When he first came, he worked in a factory. Then he got a job assisting new immigrants in settling. When he first arrived there were not many Africans, he said. In fact people would stare at you on the streets; some would even offer you money as if you were a beggar. In the factory he worked with whites and other blacks, including those from the Antilles. He had good relations with everyone, but outside work they didn't mix much. The Antilleans thought of themselves as European and didn't socialize much with Africans.

As we talked, Samba would be interrupted by customers, all women, inspecting and buying their favorite cloths. He hardly looks his age; his hair seems to have started graying recently. In his black, striped, short-sleeved shirt and vigorous manner he could be mistaken for someone in his late fifties or early sixties. He is originally from Senegal.

Samba went into business in 1974. Initially he entered the food business, but the competition was rather intense and the profits low, so he switched to textiles. He has two stores and operates a laundry business. Initially, he used to travel a lot to bring in supplies. Within Africa, he has been to Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, DRC, Zambia, and Burundi, besides several West African countries; he has also traveled to Asia. The development of the Internet has lessened his need for travel as he can arrange for supplies online. Also, many of the clothes his customers like to buy can be purchased from European factories, principally in the Netherlands. He had once tried to dabble in the diamond trade in Central Africa but he gave up when it became politically risky.

Samba said, as a businessman, he didn't face any difficulties from the state, except once when he was audited and ended up paying a lot of money in back taxes. If you are serious and do your business well, you are okay, he said. The real challenges he faces come from his customers. It is difficult dealing with some of them because they buy goods on credit and then disappear. The lack of trust extends to other businessmen as well, which makes it difficult to collaborate and establish joint ventures to expand the business. You can easily lose money trying to work with others. His biggest challenge is deciding to whom to pass on his business. He would like to retire, but his two sons are not interested in running the business. Both were born here. They used to work with him before he sent them to Senegal to start a construction business. Both are university-educated, one

is an engineer. He had hoped that one would run the construction business in Senegal and the other would return to take over from him. But both sons do not want to return because they feel they have much better business opportunities in Senegal and the surrounding countries compared to France. He has heard similar problems from some of his colleagues. It seems people who do business in Africa do not want to come here because they make more money there.

When asked about the major changes that he has witnessed concerning the African diaspora over the past sixty years, Samba sighed and was quiet for a moment. People are less honest now than when he first arrived. The Africans he dealt with then were trustworthy; if they gave you their word you could believe them. Now they are not as trustworthy. He began noticing this change in the 1990s—in 1995, he said specifically. Africans began to lose their honesty and humanity. The same was true among whites. Everybody seemed interested only in the advantages and opportunities they could take for themselves, in exploiting other people. This saddened him a great deal. Society is lost without a sense of honesty and humanity; he repeated the point several times.

The number of Africans has grown tremendously since 1948. It is no longer news to see blacks on television and in all walks of life, which was rare in those days. Also when Samba first came, many of the African immigrants were men. He was among the very first in his neighborhood to bring a wife in 1967. Most men migrated alone and only later brought their wives if they decided to stay. In those days many wanted to work for a few years and then go back. But it became increasingly difficult to go back when immigration laws were changed. But even now he thinks men outnumber women among Africans in Paris, or at least in this area. We thanked him for his generosity and promised to return and purchase some cloth. I liked several including a blue one with geometric motifs and another with a striking pastiche of black and gray lines.

Monsieur Touré, he only gave us his late name, was another old immigrant who came to France in 1964; the 3rd of August, he remembered the day. Originally from Mali, he came as a Senegalese because in those days Malians, under Modibo Keita, were prohibited from migrating abroad. So Touré went to Senegal, took Senegalese identity, and sailed to France, arriving in Bordeaux. It was easy in those days to migrate, because all that was needed was his national identity and he was given residence papers right away. In fact, within three to four days he had both a job and his French identity papers. There were still few blacks in those days, he said, so that when you walked the streets white kids would follow you and try to touch you, wondering why you were so dark; they would ask why you were dirty. Despite such unpleasant situations, it was easy to settle and integrate, as French people welcomed you.

We had found Touré with his assistant finishing a meal when we got to his shop. We had passed through the shop earlier and when his assistant, aided by Cyril, told him the purpose of our visit, he invited us to an office behind the shop. The office was filled with boxes containing music and film videos. He also sold some gold jewelry. A tall man wearing green flowing West African dress, he seemed genuinely pleased that we would be interested in his story. And hearing that I was a university professor, he turned the tables on me and ended up asking me questions so that the interview became a conversation.

For nine years after he arrived he worked in a textile factory in Lille. He felt he could do better by himself so in 1975 he established a restaurant. It proved a difficult business dealing with customers, including whites who would sometimes refuse to pay. He decided to come to Paris where he opened a clothing store. Then in 1994 the CFA franc was

devalued. His business went down as exports of textiles to West Africa became too expensive and the numbers of customers declined sharply. That's when he switched to his current music and video business to cater to the rapidly growing West African population. Thus, while his textile business had previously concentrated on the export market in West Africa, now he focused on the diaspora in France.

He has established a complex network of contacts with artists and producers in West Africa. When a musician contacts him, he asks them to send him a tape and once he is satisfied of its quality and marketability he sends them money to produce a CD or the CD is produced here. Most of his clients were initially from the DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo, but because of language problems he increasingly focused on music and video CDs in Malian languages, Bambara and Soninke.

Over the past fourteen years he has tried to make investments in West Africa. He established a photographic business with three shops in Bamako and one shop in Conakry. He provided all the machinery. The Bamako enterprise employed twelve people and he saw it as a way of helping relatives, while the Conakry shop employed six people. Unfortunately, both businesses failed. Africa is very complicated, he said, shaking his head. While Touré received a break from the Malian government in terms of exemptions from paying taxes for eight years since he was creating jobs, the business was badly managed. He only discovered later that those who ran the shop in Guinea didn't pay rent for twelve years! So he had to send money from here to pay the arrears and salary for staff, then he closed the shop. He faced similar problems in Mali. He would buy and send materials, but never received any profits to plough back into the business. He decided to leave the business to the relatives running it, telling them he would no longer send them equipment and supplies unless they sent him money for their purchases. So the business in Mali is still there but it is not doing well. He is too old to be going back and forth. He has heard similar stories from many other business owners who established businesses, from car to tanker companies; they all had bad experiences and were forced to close their businesses and either return here or concentrate their business efforts here. It appeared there was little capacity to run good businesses in Africa, he lamented.

He was truly bothered by this. Why is business capacity so poor, he asked? Is there something wrong with us; are we naturally incapable of running a business properly, or is it our culture, what is it? Is there a solution? He looked at me intently seeking answers. I found myself racking my brains for a convincing analysis that made sense to this anguished businessman. I knew all the theories of Africa's underdevelopment, but they would not do here, they seemed too easy, too glib; they needed translation based on this man's own experience. It was not natural, I said, culture had something to do with it, the moral economy of kinship, the social pressures of families, exacerbated by the withdrawal of the state from providing social services from health and education following the imposition of structural adjustment programs that led to decline in employment, devaluation of currencies and slow economic growth and even stagnation. It is a challenge that requires the interventions of all stakeholders, governments, business, society; the provision of better training and an environment that supports business and ensures adequate social services.

I was not too convinced of my lengthy, rambling explanation, but he seized on the issue of family obligations. The business in Guinea had failed, yet he hadn't employed family members. The one in Bamako had originally been managed by non-family members, until his brother called Touré and asked him why he ignored his own family and gave the business to other people instead of his own flesh and blood that needed assistance. So he

handed over the responsibility for running the business to his relatives and it started to decline. Both his relatives and non-relatives had failed him; what could he do? It became clear that any general explanation would not satisfy him and I didn't try to offer one except to commiserate with him and sympathize with his predicament. But the conversation left me pondering the challenges of diaspora business investments, how African countries can create conditions to facilitate such investments.

I asked him about the main changes he had witnessed in 44 years living in France as far as the African diaspora was concerned. He felt conditions had deteriorated; things had become more difficult for African immigrants, who find it much harder to get jobs. Africans are no longer accepted the way they used to be. The kids of the immigrants go to school but they are unable to get jobs commensurate with their qualifications, and even if they do, they don't get the respect they deserve. He gave the example of his 35-year-old daughter who works as a financial manager in the post office in charge of all credit operations. When whites and Arab customers come, they always insist on seeing the manager, thinking she can't possibly be the manager, and some even walk out when they discover she is indeed the one. Racism has grown, or at least it has become more open. He has a friend who opened a restaurant here and has a culinary and catering diploma, but he is forced to employ white people who appear as owners or managers in order to attract white customers.

He lamented that it was increasingly more difficult to raise children. Parents have little power to discipline the kids, which makes it difficult to educate them. When you try to discipline them they threaten to report you to the police for abuse. So parents feel powerless. Kids are too free and many fall into trouble. He smiled, however, when he talked about his own children. His pride was endearing. When he first came to France, he said, he could only read Arabic and hardly spoke any French. He learned to read, write, and speak French from the streets, he said, listening to people. But he was determined to educate his children, all of whom had gone to college and are professionals and have important positions. He didn't want them to get into business like him.

On relations between blacks and Arabs from Africa, he said they were sometimes neighbors but did not enjoy close relations. He attributed this to race: that the Maghrebians with their lighter skin color thought of themselves as superior to blacks. It is common for example, for black Africans to go to bistros and bars owned by Arabs, but the opposite is rare.

As we rose to leave, Touré hoped he had answered all our questions. We thanked him profusely for taking time from his busy schedule to talk with us. Buoyed by the two interviews, we briefly entertained the idea of talking to other business owners. But it was getting late and more businesses were closing. When I got back even McDonald's was closed, so I couldn't use the Internet. I was intrigued: businesses close on Sunday in this most pretentiously secular of countries in an undeniable homage to its Catholic traditions. I couldn't even find a restaurant that was open. So I ordered room service. For almost €20 I got a measly piece of salmon and cold, tasteless pasta. I regretted not buying fruit at Chateau Rouge, or even going into one of the restaurants there. I could even have waited at the Congolese restaurant.

July 14, 2008

This time Cyril was on time. We were expected at Kadya's house at 10:00 a.m. and we had agreed to meet at St. Placide station at 9:45 a.m. Kadya and Remy live in an upscale

neighborhood in a nice, spacious apartment. In fact, above them, I later learned, lives Lionel Jospin, the former French Prime Minister. When we were leaving, I joked that next time I come they should introduce me to their famous neighbor. Only if you avoid talking about African diaspora, Remy said. I will discuss the contributions of French civilization to the world, especially to poor Africa, I said sarcastically.

Their apartment is prudently furnished with a few pictures and paintings and some pieces of African sculptures, mostly masks and figures. Kadya welcomed us warmly and offered us coffee. She rose from the dining table and greeting us buoyantly. She made the espresso with practiced concentration, poured it into tiny blue cups, and lit a cigarette. Remy closed the French doors, saying he didn't want to participate in the interview since he had said all he could on the subject of African diaspora. Kadya insisted that she could speak English and so the services of Cyril were not needed. Cyril joined Remy in the dining room. I later wished he had stayed—Kadya's English was quite challenged, but I did my best to follow and nod appropriately with encouragement.

Kadya is of mixed race. Her father is Senegalese and her mother is white French. Growing up, she experienced all the confusions of identity of mixed race children. That was why she chose to study anthropology in college, she said. Her early work focused on Benin, and then she expanded to include Brazil. She was interested in comparing the development of cultural practices in the two countries, especially religion. She spoke on the articulation of the local and global in cultural production, how the success of cultural institutions and products in both countries depends on the intersection of local and transnational networks as mediated by the state.

I couldn't quite follow some of the points and arguments she was trying to make, as she struggled with her English. I didn't want to offend her by calling Cyril to my rescue. She seemed more interested in talking about Brazil than France, denying any expertise on the latter save for some personal observations. Trying to draw her to make comparisons in the histories and experiences of the African diaspora in the two countries yielded few insights. She did research in Brazil in 1995–1999 in Salvador, Bahia. I told her about my research visit to Salvador in 2006 and I knew all the people and institutions she mentioned. She was currently completing a book manuscript on Candomblé.

She contends that religious practices and identity embodied in Candomblé represent a mixture of three imaginaries: African, Christian, and Indian. She argues, contrary to conventional wisdom, that Candomblé is not a syncretic religion as such; rather it emerged as a new religion that was promoted by Catholic brotherhoods. It was not a refuge of resistance for the enslaved Africans, it represented one form of being Brazilian; it was Brazilian from its inception. Brazil, from its beginning, was built out of the three imaginaries. Syncreticism assumes the existence of distinct cultural elements that gradually fuse to construct a new culture. For her, Brazil was not simply built out of slavery, it exists because of slavery. Thus, from its inception, Brazilian culture and identity represented a social formation based on slavery and the genocide of the native peoples whose imaginary, however, constituted an integral part of Brazil.

Brazil and France differ in this fundamental sense. Brazil as a nation, she claimed, is older than France. One is built out of three imaginaries and the other is not. Race is foundational to the very construction of Brazil while it is not in the case of France. It is only now that France is becoming like Brazil in terms of talking about race, in the development of racial discourse. Racism in Brazil is different from France. In Brazil the races are far more mixed than in France. Racial mixture makes it difficult to implement policies of

positive discrimination in Brazil because it is hard to distinguish clearly those who deserve to be beneficiaries. Within the same family you can have children of different shades of color, which causes anguish in terms of access to opportunities based on race and color, but this only underscores the difficulties of drawing group boundaries for positive discrimination if the differentiations and hierarchies of privilege cut through the most basic social unit—the family itself.

She believes that the dynamics of race in Bahia have hardly changed over the last 100 years, although blacks in the cities across Brazil are getting new opportunities in terms of public sector jobs. As the spaces to work and express themselves have expanded, Afro-Brazilians are exhibiting more confidence in themselves. However, these changes are largely confined to the cities; they have not touched the rural areas.

France is becoming more conscious of its social problems tied to race, and pressures for multiculturalism have grown. But racism in France, she thinks, is different from Brazil. France as a nation was not built out of domestic slavery, the Other as a constituent part of the national space, but out of colonialism in which the Other is spatially externalized. In contemporary France, racism is expressed more in terms of access to jobs, in relation to work and opportunities than race, as such. A particular spatial dynamic is at work in the different organizations and structures of opportunity between the suburbs, where the poor live, and the city dominated by the middle classes and the wealthy. Insofar as the dynamics of exclusion in France have a lot to do with the dialectic of suburb and city, the question of race is often tied to class. I didn't think this was a peculiarly French phenomenon: in virtually every multiracial society, certainly in those with sizeable African diaspora populations, race and class are intertwined.

As in Brazil, where black activism is often expressed in cultural movements such as *Ilê Aiyê*, black discourse in France has found a particular salience in cultural expressions, such as music. Much of the cultural self-assertion is most evident in the suburbs. Increasingly, she felt, activists in the community and their academic supporters such as Pap Ndiaye were borrowing from U.S. discourses, they were portraying the racial situation in France in American terms. She felt this was a mistake, for it failed to take into account the specificities of the French situation. She was particularly concerned by an excessive focus on developments abroad, including Africa, because in her view that detracted from concentrating on problems here.

As far as she could tell, Africanists tended to concentrate on immigration, while sociologists were the ones working on race. There was little work on the African diaspora in France as such. While there was work on migration from specific communities, she hadn't come across ethnographic works on African communities in France. As far as she was concerned, in France you have African diasporas, not an African diaspora. These diasporas include the Maghrebians, West Africans, Central Africans, and Caribbeans. Each group has its own distinctive histories in their regions, their countries of origin, and in France so that it is difficult to build connections among them. North and West Africans share links through Islam. Skin color has proved an ineffective basis for engagement between Caribbeans and sub-Saharan Africans who largely are not connected.

It is not clear what makes these groups African as implied in the term *African diaspora*. The first generation migrants do maintain contacts and memories of Africa, but the second and subsequent generations often do not. But the latter often feel they do not belong here either. Consequently, they reinvent Africa as a refuge of belonging, an imaginary of Africa that has little connection to the realities in France or Africa itself. Of course,

this in part depends on how the parents came here, whether they are able to go back and forth between France and Africa and take their children with them and pass on African cultural traditions that engender the feeling of being African among their offspring. The latter are confronted by both the increasing lack of opportunities, which makes access to them more competitive, and the persistent negative images of Africa. In the history of migration to France, outsiders, such as Italian migrants have always been portrayed negatively, and France has a long history of a culture of hate against Jews and now Muslims. What makes the situation particularly tough for the African diaspora youths are the lack of opportunities, especially the difficulties they face in finding work. The standard negative portrayals of Africa include images of constant war and violence, polygamy, the mistreatment of women, and female genital mutilation, among others. Increasingly, young people are going to Africa to see the continent for themselves and they come back with positive impressions and feelings.

She commented briefly on the impact of the World Cup victory in 1998, in which France's multiracial team engendered positive national multicultural fervor and euphoria. This, however, did not fundamentally change anything. In 2005 came the riots. Many have blamed the media for inflaming the riots. It was often not pointed out that some of the rioters were white kids. The riots contributed to the stigmatization of blacks. But it also made the state more afraid of black rage and encouraged the development of efforts to address the problems facing black youths.

I asked Kadya what she thought of the future. She is very afraid, she said. It will explode. It is tragic and dangerous how the state is taking away everything—health, education, etc. The Left does not exist anymore to provide a credible alternative. It has become difficult to find a new political and intellectual language to defend rights. The only people reacting to the erosion of collective social rights are the trade unions.

On a lighter note, we talked about Obama and his prospects and reception in France. All young people, intellectuals, and those on the Left were rooting for him to win, she said.

By the time we finished and joined Remy and Cyril at the dining room table, Kadya had smoked at least three cigarettes. I can't stand tobacco smoke and I was anxious for some fresh air. I wished I spoke French, for she seemed like an exceedingly bright woman and I would have gotten more out of her if we conversed in French. With her constant smile and a voice that has a touch of hoarseness, she seemed quite interesting and friendly as well. She prepared another round of coffee and joined the conversation. I learned more about the Center for African Studies where both of them work. It used to be much bigger; now it is down to 20 people—they shared gossip about a few of their colleagues. Kadya lit another cigarette. Cyril later informed me she was Remy's second wife. He had originally been married to a white French woman with whom he had a 16-year-old daughter. As we walked out of the apartment, we saw a teenager who was listening to music with his friend who had come in as Kadya and I were talking. I wondered whether that was Kadya's son. I forgot to ask Cyril.

Cyril decided to show me two neighborhoods with sizeable African immigrant populations, one in the southeast of the city and the other a suburb in the northeast. We walked for more than a mile to catch a bus to the first neighborhood. The streets were largely deserted and most of the shops closed. This is Bastille Day, a historic day in the national pantheon. We came across a small crowd watching several military vehicles returning from a parade earlier in the morning at Champs-Élysées. Cyril wanted to stop and he even took some pictures with his camera phone. I find it hard to like anything

military and I tried gently to nudge him for us to move on. But when I saw a store open that sold exquisite shirts and ties it was my turn to linger.

The first neighborhood we stopped at was full of high rises of uneven appeal, both residential and office buildings that disrupted the architectural uniformity of inner Paris. The bypass on the over-ground rail line was under construction opposite the building where Cyril was determined to take me. He used to come here for cheap meals, he said. The moment we entered, the place screamed West Africa—all the names on the mail boxes were Senegalese or Malian; it smelled “immigrant” with the spices and oils of West African cuisine, made all the more pungent by the staleness of the air and the concrete walls that refused to breathe; it looked and sounded male with its inhabitants coming in and out, congregated in the back towards what passed as the restaurant, where lonely figures were crouched over their overstuffed plates of rice and chicken and beef stew and periodically sucking their teeth or waiting listlessly for customers besides their racks, or boisterously playing a game from home. When Cyril bought two small bottles of ginger drinks, the vendor complained, Why not the big bottles? It will make you strong for your wife and my wife will love me, he teased.

The enclave of West African male immigrant seasoning and misery suddenly disappeared as we walked to catch a train to the next neighborhood. On both sides of the River Seine was a Paris gesturing towards contemporary architecture of steel and glass office blocks, including the huge University of Finance that straddles the highway facing the river on one side, and Bercy Park on the other. Apparently Alicia Keys, whose picture is plastered on billboards all over the Metro, performed at the Pavilion last Saturday night.

From Bercy we changed trains at Nation on our way to the suburb *Croix de Chavaux*. All claims to the elegant Paris of the smart classes and tourists were abandoned. The buildings betrayed varied histories and states of construction and maintenance, which gave the place a feeling of irredeemable tiredness. The hostel we went to was crowded with black men milling around and had a dreary shabbiness that made the first apartment building we had visited earlier look genteel. Being a public holiday, it was difficult to tell whether most of these men were gainfully employed.

We learned from one young man, called Mamadou, who agreed to have an interview with us, that there were about 400 residents in the complex. Many of them were older immigrants who had been there for a long time. It is hard for a new person to secure a residence there unless you have networks, he said. Since the place is dominated by older people, young people don't like to live there if they can help it. Many, like him, come to visit friends and relatives on the weekends.

Mamadou is 32. He came here in 1997 from Mali. He was a petty trader in Mali before migrating to France, where he was attracted by employment opportunities. He got some training in the printing industry in which he worked for a while. Now he is employed in the construction industry. Tall, skinny and wearing a fade hair style, he was reluctant to talk to us at first. We thought he was a vendor, for he was standing beside displays of belts, wallets and sunglasses. They belonged to his friend who he had come to visit, he indicated. He had a job, he said with some pride. When he became comfortable enough with us, he revealed that he hasn't been back to Mali since he came because he lacks papers. But he sends money home every month. In fact, everybody here does that. He only comes here over the weekend to talk to friends because it is not possible to do so during the week. He has a wife here and so do many of these men.

This is a place for social get-togethers and solidarity; he elaborated on the dynamics of the complex. Mamadou said that if you have no job, you find solidarity here. You will

find someone to lend you money, give you food, or help in whatever way possible. It doesn't matter where you come from, which country you come from, we are all Africans here and we help each other; Paris is a difficult place. Whenever there are conflicts, they are resolved by leaders who are elected by the residents, it's important to resolve conflicts ourselves without involving the police, for that causes trouble, he stressed.

At his current job Mamadou works with people from all over, including white Frenchmen and people from Portugal, Turkey, and Arabs from North Africa. He works well with all of them; minds his own business, but the Arabs are sometimes racist against black people. His biggest ambition is to stay here, to regularize his status and live here. He doesn't want to go back to Mali because there are no opportunities there. We thanked him for sharing his story and he seemed both anxious and pleased that the interview was over.

By the time we headed back it was rush hour and the trains were full. Line 9 from Croix de Chavaux went directly to my stop at Chaussée d'Antin LaFayette. Cyril decided to change his train home from there. When I got back to the hotel I was hoping that Said Abbas Ahmed, whom we had expected to meet in the suburb where he lives and which we had visited, would not come to the hotel as we had planned. He was unable to meet in the suburb and I suggested that instead of us waiting for him there he could come to the hotel. He wanted to interview me. An hour after I returned, there he was.

In the end, I was glad I talked to him. He has an earnest idealism that reminds me of myself at his age. Ageing seems to foster cynicism, which can be debilitating; it's good occasionally to be reminded of the possibilities, of the future, instead of wallowing in the past and using experience as a bulwark against going out on a limb instead of as a guide for action. For the next two and a half hours he interviewed me about African universities; knowledge production; development challenges; reasons for conflict in the Great Lakes region in Africa, including Rwanda and the DRC; and the nature of leadership. He shared his passion for uplifting Africa, for teaching in the DRC where he had worked before, and for establishing a leadership academy. He promised to send me a tape of the interview—an edited version which would be posted on the website of the Sorbonne student group that he led.

Being a holiday, none of the nearby cafés was open and McDonald's seemed a lot more appealing and cheaper than the dinner I ordered last night. I could also use the Internet. I had my chicken salad alright, but the Internet was not working. I felt slightly cheated.

June 15, 2008

We went back to Chateau Rouge to talk to business people and learn more of the changes the African diaspora community has gone through from their vantage point. We had a meeting with Mr. Ade, who we were supposed to meet last Saturday. He runs a shipping and freight company called Global Express. When we arrived, the office was full of boxes taped with black cell foam. Throughout the interview, customers came and went and we would resume the conversation where we left off. I had the impression that he thought the interview was eating into his valuable time but he was too polite to show it. The fact that both he and Cyril are from the DRC probably accounted for his patience with us.

Global Express first opened in 1996 in Belgium. The office in Paris opened in 1998. He himself came to France from the DRC in 1998. The business was opened by his brother, whom he has been helping since then. The business used to do much better than it does

now, he said. They opened branches wherever there was a sizeable Congolese diaspora in South Africa, Angola, Britain, and Canada. The office in Canada was closed due to poor business, while those in the three other countries were closed because of mismanagement. The South African one had been run by the daughter of Tabu Ley, the famous musical maestro. They lost a lot of money in the process. They did a comparative investigation of the businesses in each of the three countries, why they failed, and how they could be improved. One conclusion is that they were stretched too thin too fast for proper oversight and they didn't fully understand these markets. One solution they adopted for Angola was to establish partnerships with local companies and use their services to send goods to the country. This might be a better model, he suggested, than going alone. It was hard to understand business conditions and find reliable partners in Africa. However, now their entire business in Africa is focused on the DRC where they operate two offices in Kinshasa and one in Lubumbashi. In Europe, they maintain this office and the one in Brussels. The Paris business is doing much better than the Brussels one because the diaspora seems to have more money here.

The real turning point for the business started 4–5 years ago. Previously, they used to cater mainly to traders who bought goods in Europe and used their services to send them to Africa. The competition from Asia changed all that. African business people increasingly began going to China and India, bypassing Europe altogether. As a result, their business became more dependent on individuals and families sending goods back home. Previously, they would ship things four times a week. Now this has been drastically reduced because of limited volumes; many individuals typically send goods back home once a month. Their best season is the holiday period—June through December. Many people are forced to use their services because of airline restrictions on how much they can carry. They tried to meet the African challenge by opening an office in Dubai but gave up because of lack of business and high taxes.

Officially, their business is only involved in freight services. But informally they are involved in transferring money. This is something all African businesses here do, he claimed as if pleading for a justification. But he didn't want to pursue the matter further. He was a lot more comfortable talking about networking among Congolese businesses. He does not deal regularly with other African business people, he said. The Congolese business people meet from time to time to share information on prices, customs, and changes in the DRC. Last month, for example, the DRC announced a new law on tariffs and Congolese diasporan business people met to respond with a common strategy. They often discuss how to do business and help development efforts in their communities at home, but they do not and are not able to support common projects as such.

It was when we discussed the changes he has witnessed in the last decade that he became quite passionate, almost agitated, especially on the subject of gender relations. The major change he had noticed is that people were becoming more conscious that they were foreigners. This is because of growing hostility from the French government and the wider society. Things used to be a lot easier. As things have become harder, people are beginning to prepare for a future in Africa. He has noticed more people going back home to build homes and establish businesses. Even some who have been here longer than he has, increasingly realize France is not their home and they will have to go back sooner or later, especially when they get old. The attitudes of the children born here is quite different. They feel they are French. But he believes their consciousness as foreigners will grow as they get older and become more alienated because of bad treatment by the French government and people. I wondered whether the desire to establish homes and prepare to return home was simply the result of changing conditions in France or the ageing of

the first generation migrants. Cyril and I explored this in our discussion later and we concluded both played a role and of course varied according to class position in the diaspora and the possibilities back home.

Ade also noted that people were becoming more interested in politics back home, which, besides the changing sense of security here, also reflected political changes back home connected to democratization. There were now a lot of political meetings among Congolese, even some demonstrations from time to time, and the formation of associations and pressure groups, for the DRC this is largely fueled by the recent civil war. These agitations are among ordinary Congolese not just academics and other professionals, Cyril added.

The real heat came when I asked him about changes in social dynamics. I am not sure whether the presence of two women in the office at that point added to his masculine belligerence. Relations between women and men were not good at all, he glowered. Women were adopting European behavior, they wanted to be free and independent of their men. This attitude was facilitated by the government which gave them money and apartments and supported them when they complained about their men. This was true whether the woman had come by themselves or been brought by their husbands. It was terrible how these women were abandoning African culture. Women think that they are like men because they are working and earning a salary, sometimes even more than their husbands. A frequent source of problems is when women send money back home without telling their husbands. They don't seem to care about the family budget. One of the women objected in Lingala, which Cyril translated. She used to be beaten by her husband whom she reported to the police, she said. That was not love. She was better off without him, she sneered as she paid Ade in euros and dollars. Her two-year-old son was playing with a toy on the floor. The woman sitting on a chair who had been following the conversation with a dismissive frown nodded her head vigorously.

As we left the Global Express, I insisted to Cyril that we should talk to businesswomen. In fact, I had also asked if he could arrange for me to talk to Antilleans and Maghrebians to get their perspective. So far he had not succeeded. A female doctoral student of Moroccan origin who was working on the Moroccan diaspora in France that he had contacted had expressed interest in talking with me but was out of Paris this week.

In three shops, women refused to be interviewed, saying they were too busy. In the third the owner said we could come tomorrow, she needed advance notice. Cyril and I ruminated on the gender dynamics of research, business, and time. We were luckier on our fourth attempt. It was a beauty salon called Mama Cosmetics, well stocked with wigs of all colors and textures and hair and facial creams. Two women were sitting facing each other and turned to us suspiciously when we entered. Cyril began explaining the purpose of our visit in French. They frowned. When he said I didn't speak French, one of them said we could speak in English. There was a slight thaw. They were both from Ghana.

The owner of the shop, who looked younger than the other woman, came to France in 1983 and established the shop in 2000. Before then she had been a housewife. What challenges did she face in setting up and operating the business? She faced no challenges, she said emphatically, she was always looking for opportunities. She had customers from all backgrounds, different African countries and even some whites. She had established fruitful contacts with suppliers in London and the United States. Business was good. While upbeat about her own personal situation, she noted that over the last 25 years things had become more difficult for Africans. But Africans, especially African women, were creative. More people were establishing businesses. Women in particular were doing

well, better than the men. The older woman jumped in: no women doing housewife today, everybody equal, she said. Business is the way to go, the younger woman resumed, not to be employed in an office and be mistreated, you open your own business. She worked hard for her business, she stated. She learned French when she came to France.

The older woman volunteered information that the younger woman was married to a Frenchman, although she didn't say whether black or white, and was a citizen, while she herself wasn't yet a citizen. Ninety percent of my customers, the younger woman said, are Francophone; some don't even know she is Anglophone she laughed for the first time. She goes home very often, every year, sometimes even three times a year. She goes to see family mostly, and has no business there and no plans to establish one. Her children are here and this is where she will continue staying. If she were to establish a business in Ghana, people would chop her money. She looked at her watch as if signaling the twenty minutes she had given us was up. Almost as if on cue two customers walked in and she left us to help them choose a wig. Neither she nor the older woman wore wigs themselves; one wore braids the other short natural hair. The older woman had considerably warmed up to us by now. She wanted to start her own business, she confided. She was once a hospital worker but fell off a train and was badly injured, in fact paralyzed. She spent four and a half months in the hospital and now lives on disability. She pointed to her left leg and cane tactfully hidden behind the chair. Suddenly her age showed; she was probably in her mid-60s.

Last night I had told Said that I would like to talk to both him and his father about their experiences in France. His father seemed to have an interesting history as a former sailor and this would provide a wonderful intergenerational window into the diaspora experience. He and his father were taking a train at 5:30 p.m. to Dunkirk where Abbas grew up. We agreed this morning to meet at Gare du Nord, the station for trains to the north, including Belgium and Britain.

Gare du Nord was surprisingly close on foot from Chateau Rouge. On the way we stopped by a men's shop. The prices were a far cry from those at the department store near my hotel. They were quite comparable to what I was used to. The shop attendant, an Algerian man, he was quick to tell us, called us his brothers. As Africans, he promised to give us a good deal. Africans have to stick together, he said. We got caught in the moment, I tried on two suit jackets, and both fit wonderfully. Good, good, he chanted. I did not intend to buy anything, but I enjoyed this mercantile diasporic banter, feigned or not. I hadn't brought a credit card and had no more than €25 in my pocket. He insisted that we leave a small deposit. We politely declined as he went to put the jackets back on the racks, wondering why we did this to him, a fellow African.

We arrived at the meeting point with Abbas and his father at exactly 2:00 p.m. Several minutes later they joined us. We went to the station's main restaurant. Abbas and his father favor one another, as African Americans say; he is the spitting image of his father. I figured he was my father's age or even older, for he looked a little frailer than my father. He was wearing a loose red jacket and a Muslim cap. Abbas told me that his father has never been interviewed before and he did not see why anybody would be interested in his life, which was quite ordinary. With that in mind I began by thanking the old man, throwing in a few *Kiswahili* words here and there, telling him his life story was important for us younger people, that we had much to learn from him. Abbas translated in Swahili. Cyril left us long before the interview ended for a 3:00 p.m. appointment.

Mr. Ahmed senior first came to France in 1965 through Marseilles. Born and bred in the Comoros before coming to France, he had worked in Mauritius, Madagascar, and

had even been to Dar es Salaam, where there is a large Comorian community, Said added. When he first came to France he did a lot of piece jobs. When they went into offices looking for jobs, white people would run after them. Who are you, they would ask, what are you looking for, are you looking for jobs? Jobs were plentiful in those days, although of course some didn't get jobs or the jobs they wanted. He was a shipman, a sailor, first and foremost. He got a job with Compagnie Générale Maritime and later found another job with the biggest shipping company in Dunkirk. It was not easy to find this job; in fact, it took him three years to get it. It took him around the world. He would periodically return to Comoros, one time for two years between 1972 and 1974, then again in 1980. Each time he would come back to the company, until 1989 when it re-registered in Liberia and conditions deteriorated. As French workers, he and his colleagues refused to work under the new conditions that entailed lower wages, sailing for a whole year instead of four months before taking a break, receiving poor rations of rice and a glass of wine when previously they had been amply fed with good food and plentiful drinks. Clearly, the re-configured company wanted cheaper labor.

While working for Dorbini he traveled all around the Mediterranean and Atlantic visiting port cities from Italy to Spain and Portugal, as far as Argentina, Brazil and the United States. He saw many cultures and met many people, including blacks in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and in Charleston and two other American ports. It broadened his horizons, made him realize black people lived everywhere. They share a lot of similarities, but also differences depending on the country. Whenever he returned to the Comoros, people not only regarded him as a Frenchman but a worldly man, and some were jealous of his good fortune. But in the end he wants to return home, to retire there. He has spent a long time abroad, but home is where his heart is now. He knows life back home is tougher than it is here and some Comorians prefer to retire here for that reason, but he believes he will be at greater peace if he returns home. It reminded me of my father who now wants to return to Malawi after a life of wandering across southern Africa from his youth, including taking up Botswanan citizenship where he has lived since 1983.

The African population in France has grown tremendously since he first came. He believes there were no more than a handful of blacks in Dunkirk then. He recalls one day walking down the street and when a child saw him he frantically called his mother and grandmother to come and see this strange black apparition of a person. The situation has improved a lot. It was more racist then than it is now, and wages and living conditions were much lower. A lot of African people living here feel at home and relations among different communities, including among Africans from different regions, are better. It is important if Africans want to be accepted here to keep quiet while at the same time keeping their eyes and ears open. He has always believed in being friendly with everybody. Life was a little hard for mixed race children who did not grow up with their fathers. Children of Africans only remain interested in Africa if their fathers are there, otherwise they don't pay much attention. He knew of some Comorians who had children with white French women but abandoned those children. That was not right, he said softly.

When his father excused himself to go to the bathroom, Abbas explained that he came to live in France at the age of ten and grew up in Dunkirk. He has done all his education since then in France. His parents have eight children, including those that both of them brought from previous relationships. There was no question in his mind that his generation was better off than his parents' generation. They are better trained and positioned to access and get good positions. The generational transition among Africans has been much

quicker than for many other groups. Here he is the son of an ill-educated sailor with a teaching position at the elite École Nationale d'Administration. He knows many people of his generation like that. Unlike their parents who were deferential, his generation is more assertive; they believe they can do it, achieve much more than their parents could have dreamed of. There are more black people on television than there were ten years ago, more black experts featured. He mentioned Harry Roselmack who runs one of France's and Europe's most important television magazine programs on TFI, *20H Journal*. Abbas himself organized a meeting of 28 Comorians elected to municipal offices in France, which could not have been imagined several decades ago.

All of us, he said with a passion that seemed to fascinate his father, are fighting from many positions, as politicians, intellectuals, businessmen, artists. Now you even have black policemen and immigration officials. When he is met by such officials at the airport he feels he is returning home. The first time he felt truly French was when he was on the European student exchange program, ERASMUS, in Limerick, Ireland as everybody asked him about France, to explain what was going on in France. We have a mission to succeed, he declared as if he was talking to several people, and we will succeed. We need to build networks in every sector from the academy to business to the media to politics to constantly improve our position, to ensure that ten years from now we are better off than ten years ago, than today.

I asked him to give his views on relations among the African diaspora, the growth of black French identity, and diasporic connections in Europe and with Africa. He recalled that growing up in Dunkirk, relations between Africans and Caribbeans were difficult, the latter even had their own soirées and each group their own prejudices. The Caribbeans had color prejudices against dark-skinned Africans. Comorians, for their part call them *mshenzi* or *gadagada*, which does not quite mean slave, but someone unsophisticated. At that time, the Caribbeans enjoyed a slightly higher standard of living than the Africans, for they had been here longer. Later, things began to improve as we got to know each other and confronted similar prejudices in school and the wider society.

As for the Maghrebians, especially the Algerians, Ahmed senior told us, they feel that they fought for their independence while we did not. This gives them an enormous sense of pride. They also have a strong sense of being Muslim, which often connects them to other Africans. But he pointed out there are strong divisions among the Maghrebians as well, between the Kabyle (Berbers) who distinguish themselves from the Arabs. The Kabyle regard themselves as the original inhabitants of Kabyle, their Maghrebian homeland. They try to distinguish themselves from other North Africans and Muslims. They seek to express their cultural pride and difference by not observing some Muslim rituals such as Ramadan and by defending their language. You find many Kabyle nationalists at Cité Internationale Universitaire, Abbas added. Overall, despite cooperation with individuals, and having friends among the various groups, a collective African diasporic student organization has never been built.

The growth of black French identity is quite recent, he argued. It can actually be traced to 2001–2002 when Christiane Taubira brought up the issue of commemorating and imagining the memories of colonialism and slavery. Slavery was of particular concern to the Caribbeans whose resentment of Africans was in part based on charges that they had sold their ancestors into slavery. The Caribbeans had strong associations especially within the trade union movement. At the same time, African-led movements were also emerging. In parliament, Taubira has brought the discourse of black identity into the public arena. This was increasingly articulated in the discourse of diversity—how to make France a

more inclusive society in reality, not just rhetorically—. In 2002–2003 the government formed HALDE (Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Égalité) headed by Louis Schweitzer, former head of Renault and chief of staff of Prime Minister Laurent Fabius.

In addition, there was the symbolic impact of the French victory in the 1998 World Cup and the 2000 European Cup by a team that was multicultural. To see black and Arab players wrapping themselves in the French flag was electrifying, Abbas continued. This showed black people, for the first time, proudly wearing the French flag. This strengthened the sense of a French community that included blacks and galvanized the black movement. In Abbas' view, a black identity should include everyone of African origin. In reality, however, this identity is only emerging and is much weaker than the Maghrebien identity whose memories and representations for example in film and literature are much stronger. I asked him for a list of some prominent artists from those communities and he promised to e-mail it to me together with a list of sites where French black identity is being discussed. A few hours later he had done so. I was impressed by his diligence.

As for diasporic connections within Europe, he felt they were not well developed. He contrasts this with the connections developed, for example, through the social forum project that started in Port Allegro, Brazil several years ago and which has now become a powerful transnational movement. There are no transnational connections organized around culture, business, or sports, let alone politics. In this sense, black identity is weak; it is not anchored by concrete connections that, for example, overarch Jewish transnationalism. For us, it is largely sustained by emotional ties rather than structures, individual connections and initiatives rather than systematic organization. Whenever Abbas travels in the diaspora, for example, he meets other diasporans who treat him well. But we need to go beyond this, to develop a collective identity based on concrete issues that people can identify with and are ready to fight for and establish connections over. I wondered whether this was indeed possible for the Pan-Africa world, given its sheer demographic size, and national and historical diversities.

Turning specifically to France, Abbas argued that organizations such as CRAN are useful, but there is a need to go beyond the victimization mentality and adopt a more self-referential, positive, and future-driven program for our rights. It is in this context that he was interested in establishing an African Leadership Institute, which he envisioned running meetings like the Davos World Economic Forum where key thinkers, activists, and leaders from a cross section of sectors could meet and create visions and concrete steps for Africa and the diaspora in 10, 20, or 30 years; a forum that could strategize and plan for economic and other engagements amongst Africa and the countries in the global North where large African diasporas live. I was impressed by the breadth of his ambitions. Before doubts crept in, cynicism about the unfulfilled visions of Pan-Africanism from yesteryear, including today—the frustrated promises of the AU and NEPAD and a host of other institutions and visionary agendas—I thanked him and his father for a most enjoyable, enlightening afternoon.

I got back to the hotel early enough to have dinner at an Algerian bistro near the hotel after which I checked the Internet at McDonald's. Afterwards, I delved into the fine novel, *Small Island* by the Jamaican British author Andrea Levy, on the Windrush West Indian immigrants to Britain. Already, it seems more compelling, its characters more developed than *The Lonely Londoners*. It's hard to put down.

July 16, 2008

This was an unusually long day combining the usual round of interviews, last minute shopping, and a late farewell dinner with Remy and Cyril. The interviews were staggered throughout the day beginning with Hope Finance at 11:00 a.m., then with Madame Diop at 3:00 p.m., and finally with Brice Ahounou at 6:30 p.m. The first set of shopping was at Chateau Rouge where the salesman was from Mauritius and predictably pulled the bit about African brotherhood and solidarity. The suits were of a much higher quality than the ones we had seen yesterday. After joyful bantering and bargaining I bought three at what appeared to be reasonable prices. The first round of shopping occurred after the interview with the managing director of Hope Finance. The second after my meeting with Madame Diop for Cassandra and Natasha.

The founder of Hope Finance / Hope Health, Severin Demanou Kengni, is a dynamic man who talks quickly and with the passionate energy of an entrepreneur and an activist. He is from Burkina Faso with an ambitious vision of mobilizing and channeling diaspora resources and skills into investments that will promote African development. He stressed that Africa and the diaspora owed each other strategic collaboration. Remittances had to do more than provide extra consumption for relatives and the poor in the informal economy. They were a critical source of investment in the major formal economic and social sectors including industry, financial services, education, and healthcare.

His company seeks to provide innovative health care services. Operating a network of hospitals, clinics, doctors, specialists, and researchers in several countries in Europe, the U.S., Canada, and Africa, Hope Finance / Hope Health offers the diaspora opportunities to access health care services for relatives, friends, and employees across Africa and the diaspora. Using telemedicine, tele-consultation and local facilities, Hope Finance / Hope Health enables diasporans visiting Africa to access medical care as good as that available in their countries of residence in the global North. As I listened, it became clear to me that outside the academy where I spend much of my life fascinating developments and creative experiments are taking place in the world of diaspora engagements with Africa.

Visiting Madame Diop was a treat. She welcomed us to her office packed with books. Seating next to her was her daughter, a lovely woman in her 40s, who elaborated on her mother's remarks. Much of our discussion centered on the role of *Presence Africaine* in the growth of the Pan-African movement, literature, scholarship, and the larger-than-life personalities that passed through the doors of this legendary bookstore and publishing house, established in 1947 by Alioune Diop, who died in 1980. I listened with rapt fascination as she told of stories of the famous writers and activists she met, many who became luminaries of the Pan-African firmament through *Presence Africaine*, from Richard Wright to Frantz Fanon to Aimé Césaire, not to mention her countryman, Leopold Sédar Senghor. Césaire passed away about three months ago, at the grand old age of 95. His posters are plastered all over the bookstore. Together with Senghor, who also died at the ripe old age of 95, he founded the influential *négritude* movement.

Presence Africaine was the premier Pan-African intellectual and literary medium of the 1950s. It published, publicized, and politicized numerous African and diasporan writers. In 1956, it organized the first Congress of Black Writers and Artists that brought together the leading lights of the Pan-African letters and politics. When her husband died, Madame Diop took over running *Presence Africaine*. She recounted some of the challenges

she has encountered to keep the business afloat as publishers and outlets for African and diasporan writers have expanded, as the Pan-African movement has splintered into various state nationalisms, and as technologies and economics of publishing have changed. I shared with her some of my thoughts on these challenges based on my work on African publishing and knowledge production. But she and her daughter insisted *Presence Africaine* would survive and they took immense pride in its achievements and place in Pan-African literary and publishing history. We exchanged contacts as I left. I told them how truly privileged I felt to have met them both.

The rest of the evening was appropriately more lighthearted. My interview with Brice was interesting, but we covered little new ground on the African diaspora in France. For dinner Remy and Cyril took me to one of their favorite restaurants not too far from EHESS. We had a most wonderful time talking about everything African academics tend to when they meet, from the rotten state of African politics and economies, to our marginalization in the academies of the global North, to the pressures and pleasures of our personal and professional lives. It was a most agreeable end to the city of lights. Cyril was even kind enough to see me off at my hotel.

July 17, 2008

The alarm clock went off and by the time the taxi driver came I was waiting in the lobby. The drive to the airport took a good three quarters of an hour, much of the delay was due to stops at traffic lights before we got on the highway to the airport. After nine days I felt a lot more familiar with the city and its neighborhoods and a lot better informed about the history of African peoples in this proud European country.

The two-hour wait at the airport and the nine-hour flight to Chicago were uneventful. Thankfully, the young woman sitting next to me on the aisle seat did not show any interest in talking to me, nor I to her. When she pulled her passport to fill in the immigration forms I noticed she was Mexican. I spent much of the flight reading and writing. Not once did I try to watch in-flight movies. There was a time I looked forward to watching movies during long flights. Not anymore. With movies On Demand available on the home TV, I have either seen the movies already, or they are not worth watching; it's amazing how predictably banal Hollywood movies have become.

Chicago was hot and humid when I arrived. The traffic was painfully slow, but the Ethiopian taxi driver's cheerfulness and talkativeness made it more bearable. I am amazed at how many Africans are taxi drivers in Chicago. Almost every taxi I take is driven by an African, mostly from Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, and Ethiopia, some with university degrees. What a waste of talents this is.

I was excited to get home, to put the research trip behind me and enjoy some quiet time in Chicago before the next leg of the journey in search of African diasporas, this time to Cuba. A beaming Natasha opened the door when I got home. Cassandra came down after finishing her bath. We sat in the family room talking, teasing, and laughing. It felt good to be back home, or rather, back to my home in the diaspora.

Cuba

July 20, 2008

The costs of the embargo to Cuba became readily apparent the moment I got back from Paris and started planning for my next trip. On Friday, I discovered while trying to arrange for an advance for research expenses that the travel agent, Maruzul, had only booked my flight from Nassau to Havana. When I called the travel agent, she said they were not responsible for the flight from Chicago to Nassau. Couldn't they have told me? Last year they had booked me from Chicago to Miami for the same trip, which I ended up cancelling. New rules had come up about travel to Cuba; no more direct flights from the U.S. to Cuba as of July. You now have to go through Nassau or Acapulco. In order to catch the Nassau-Havana flight on Monday at 12:30 p.m., I had to leave Chicago Sunday, and the most direct flight left at 12:35 p.m. My Sunday was shot. A journey of three hours or so would now take two days!

I was not amused by this sudden change of plans, being robbed of an extra day. The taxi picked me up from the house at 9:45 a.m. The flight was on one of those small jets I thought I had finally gotten away from when I left State College. But the entire two-and-three-quarter-hour flight was smooth and I buried myself in the magazines I had purchased at the airport. For the long journey they served one small packet of pretzels and a drink, anything more you had to purchase. Fortunately, my stomach was full from a rather tasteless chicken burger I had eaten in one of the airport restaurants.

The Bahamas was hot and humid, but the airport staff was their usual tourist-friendly selves. I was squeezed into a van taking a family to Paradise Island. I sat in the front with the driver, Philip, he said his name was, a friendly, talkative fellow. When the white family, the parents and their two sons, greeted his chatter with silence, I indulged him. There seemed to be new construction all along the road since the last time I came for holiday a year ago; sumptuous villas and holiday condos; not to mention new or refurbished hotels. Tourism must be booming, not from Americans, though, with the weakening dollar, I thought.

The Nassau Palm Hotel, a pink looking structure of five stories was a terrible disappointment. I hadn't expected luxury, not with the price I had paid, but a little courtesy from the receptionist, who never once looked up let alone smiled, and less odor from the tired and stained carpet in the room would have been welcome. Why do hotels, especially in hot tropical climates, bother with carpets they cannot afford to change regularly? When I ate dinner in the open air restaurant facing the pool where a group of youngsters was swimming, I was told I could not charge it to the room but had to pay cash. One of the waiters followed me to the room to get the money. I debated whether to even tip him. The meal was delicious but they skimped on the chicken and plantains. The only relief was that the TV had some of my favorite comedies that I hadn't seen in months, even if they were mostly repeats. I avoided the news talk shows like a plague. It was the same opinionated, ignorant pundits pontificating with arrogant irrelevance about the petty

twists and turns in the electoral rhetoric of Obama and McCain. Who takes those fools seriously, I wondered.

I had not been feeling well since yesterday. It felt like I was coming down with flu or something. Maybe my body was trying to tell me to ease up a little bit. It's been a hectic few weeks, the changes of countries and climes, foods and time zones, experiences and engagements. And now comes perhaps the most fascinating and challenging of this summer's research trips—Cuba, the land of revolution and home to proportionally one of the largest African diasporas in the Americas. I swallowed more medicine—I need to be fit for Cuba.

July 21, 2008

Philip, the taxi driver, came to pick me up at 10:00 in the morning as he had promised. I felt a little worse than I did last night. This is no way to travel, I thought, but I kept up a cheerful demeanor to match Philip's as he rattled about how beautiful women in Cuba were, he had heard, for he hadn't yet been there himself and he knew several Bahamian men who came back with Cuban women. He wouldn't mind visiting Cuba, but his girlfriend would probably not allow him to go by himself. The traffic on the single-lane road that snaked between the sea and the beach hotels was slight. The open public beach, which yesterday had been packed with cars and locals swimming and having picnics, was virtually deserted save for a handful of young dark bodies jutting in and out of the clear blue waters. We briefly stopped by the Sheraton where I confirmed my booking upon return from Cuba.

I got to the airport more than two hours before departure time. The first surprise was that there was nobody at the counter for Cubana Airlines. An hour, then half an hour before departure time there was still nobody. I asked a Bahamian airport staff person walking up and down the aisle what the delay was all about. They are often late, she said. Surely, something could be announced, I suggested. She shrugged her shoulders. I later learned she was a college student studying tourism and foreign languages at a local college. Those of us waiting for Cubana were not the only ones. Some had been waiting for Air Jamaica since morning. Finally, the counter was opened and check-in started. It was clear we would not be leaving at 12:30 p.m., but neither did I think the flight would be delayed until 3:30 p.m. I could have eaten some breakfast before leaving the hotel, I thought ruefully as I walked around the airport looking for a restaurant. There were only grocery shops selling pastries and one had popcorn as well. Inside the terminal, one sold hot dogs. As much as I don't care for hot dogs, I helped myself to two and a soda!

The plane looked as if it was from another era once we got inside. Free seating and half empty, the worn-out seat covers and old metal fixtures betrayed its age. And when the engine started, steam seemed to ooze from vents in the middle of the plane. Quite a spectacle that was, but when it took off, the plane glided through the Caribbean skies like a bird. For food, we were served pretzels and a drink; on this, at least communism and capitalism seemed to agree—starve the passengers.

Havana Airport looked surprisingly new and remarkable with its red and white color scheme. The immigration officer asked me to remove my glasses and my cap as she checked my passport. Welcome to Cuba, she smiled, as she handed the passport back. As soon as

we left customs and the doors opened to the people waiting outside, the black face of Cuba announced itself loudly and unambiguously. There were black people everywhere, brown people, and white people too. As I sat waiting for transport to the hotel, I watched this mixed crowd move around, converse, and do business with unusual ease, at least by American standards. I saw similar scenes at bus stops. Mixture seemed to be a fitting metaphor of the Havana that unfolded before me as we drove to the hotel with its wide boulevards and narrow streets, and in the latest Japanese car models and vintage American and Soviet automobiles. The buildings, too, alternately smart and scruffy, were combinations of the flamboyant architecture of a bygone capitalist era and the stiff proletarian dwellings and office blocks of socialist Cuba. For rush hour, the traffic was rather light and we got to the hotel within half an hour.

Formerly the Havana Hilton, the Havana Libre is a massive hotel of 26 or 27 stories. In the cavernous lobby, a band was playing music. There was a festive atmosphere and for a moment I could forget the time it had taken to get here and the fact that I was not feeling well. The room was huge; it overlooked the bay and I was able to enjoy the spectacular vista of this defiant, compact seaside city. From my fourteenth floor window, the elegance of the city was unmistakable, but so was the faded presence of some of its buildings badly in need of repair and paint. I could hardly contain my excitement. I was finally in Havana, Cuba!

The sumptuous buffet in the huge restaurant on the second floor was a hungry traveler's treat. There were dishes of every kind. I settled for ample helpings of seafood salad and squash, or pumpkins, as we call them back home. And this banquet, compared to Europe, was very cheap, Cuban \$21. As I wiped my contented lips, I wondered whether this was another thread in Cuba's mixtures—tourist opulence amidst local destitution. So much for socialism, I thought to myself.

July 22, 2008

The costs of the embargo quickly deepened for me. I could not open a credit line for phones and meals because American-issued credit cards do not work in Cuba. I should have read the information from Maruzul more carefully. I was left with the stark realization that I didn't have enough money for my subsistence, let alone to cover the research costs. This became abundantly clear when I met my local contact, Rita Olga. The only consolation was that breakfast was included in my prepaid hotel charges. And I made sure to stuff myself and consoled myself that if I ran out of money at least I would have a hearty breakfast, that's more than what is available to many people around the world.

Rita came around 1:00 p.m. A dark, friendly woman, we immediately established a rapport. I had woken up feeling a little worse than yesterday and my medication ran out, so when she called around 12:30, I was lying in bed trying to get some rest. She said she was a black Cuban, middle-aged, wearing colored pants and a white-and-blue top. When I saw her I teased that I should have mentioned that I was a middle-aged black man as well.

She explained that July and August were difficult months to visit for research because most people were away on holiday with their families, but she would try her best for me to meet with as many people and visit as many places relevant to my project as possible.

She was concerned about my visa. I told her I had come on an official research visa and she took the necessary details. Then we came to talking about money. To my surprise she said the people we talked to would expect to be paid for their time, the equivalent of \$100–150 each depending on their status. My jaw dropped. Another 350 pesos would probably be needed to rent a car for any out-of-town trip. Finally, there was the matter of her fee; she agreed to the figure proposed in my grant. Altogether, I would need about U.S. \$2,000. The question was how to get this money here. I had \$400 unchanged, and a little less than 200 pesos on me. For the next hour or so we went to several banks and Western Unions to seek advice on how the money could be transferred. We finally ended up at a bank where someone seemed to know what they were talking about. The best option would be for the money to be wired from a Canadian bank that has an arrangement with the Cuban bank. Western Union only allows transfers of \$300. When I returned to the hotel I contacted my cousin Paul in Ottawa, but he was still at work. I asked his partner, Danielle, to ask him to call me back as a matter of emergency. I almost kicked myself, I should have prepared accordingly. The only excuse is that I have never been to an embargoed country before and the back-to-back nature of my trips had left little time to prepare.

Walking to the various financial institutions gave me a chance to see a little bit of central Havana. It was unbearably hot, so much so that Rita unfolded her umbrella. The streets were immaculately clean, but many of the buildings wore visible signs of wear and tear. The walk also gave me a chance to find out more about Rita. I knew she was a scholar at the University of Havana. I found out she is a historian and quite well informed about African and American politics. We discussed Cuba's decisive intervention in Southern Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, and the prospects of Obama's candidacy and what an Obama victory might mean for the U.S. embargo on Cuba, which, she maintained, and after my experiences of the last couple of days couldn't agree with more, have negative effects on both Cubans and Americans wishing to deal with the island. She talked briefly about the racial situation in Cuba, how after the revolution, great efforts were made to eliminate racial inequalities and equalize opportunities, but the fact that blacks and whites were starting at different vantage points in terms of assets and resources meant that differences remained, which Castro himself later acknowledged. While there are hardly any black-only organizations in Cuba, as in the U.S., different black cultural patterns persist with regard to marriage, for examples. Fewer blacks than whites live in formal marriage unions. Overall, black culture, specifically music and religion, has had a powerful influence on Cuban society. I mentioned the export of Cuban rumba to the continent. As we parted, I knew this would be a productive visit. My real challenge was to get the money!

For the rest of the afternoon I decided to take it easy in my room. I decided to check e-mail and found a message from Paul that he had tried to call but couldn't get through. I re-sent the number in case Danielle had copied it wrongly and waited anxiously for his call in the evening. I couldn't call from my room. The less-than-two-minute call I made in the afternoon from the call center in the lobby cost 6.5 pesos and 19 minutes on the Internet cost 3 pesos. I wonder why 19 minutes. I feel cut off, a minor inconvenience most certainly compared to the real hardships people on this remarkable island have had to bear from nearly five decades of unrelenting and vindictive ostracization by the United States. On the way from the airport yesterday I saw a huge poster portraying George W. Bush as a terrorist. A terrorist indeed—an ideologue who seeks to inflict maximum harm to a country and its people in the name of self-righteous ideological cause, which has been the history of American presidents and Cuba since John F. Kennedy in the 1960s.

Will Obama have the courage, the audacity to chart a new course with Cuba? Only time will tell. But for the sake of political decency, it is long overdue.

July 23, 2008

It was a horrible night; I could hardly sleep. I was feverish and coughing. I woke up groggy, convinced that I needed to see a doctor. After breakfast, I came back to the room and took a nap before going downstairs to meet Rita for my first appointment with Professor Digna Castaneda, one of the leading Cuban historians, an elderly black woman. She is waiting for us in her office, a block away from the hotel, Rita said. I immediately liked her. A dark, skinny woman, almost frail, she has big expressive eyes and a firm voice. She kept pulling her loose-fitting blouse to her skinny shoulders as she flashed occasional smiles. "You look so young," she said as she welcomed us to her office in the building of the faculty of history and philosophy. The building, as I saw with other buildings when I was taken on a tour of the University of Havana, had obviously seen better days. Paint and plaster were peeling from the walls in the corridors and the chairs in one of the offices were brown with dirt. The building had once been a house for one of Cuba's leading early savants, one of the founders of the nation.

I thanked Professor Castaneda for her willingness to see me. Rita, who obviously has great respect for her, formally introduced her to me, noting that she is one of the most eminent senior scholars in Cuba and the Caribbean, renowned for her great works including books and articles. She is also a magnificent person. She serves as head of Caribbean Studies at the University. One of her books was co-published with Lisa Brock of Columbia College in Chicago, entitled *Between Race and Empire*.

It turned out this was only a preliminary meeting for introduction. We would have four other meetings in the course of my stay to discuss three major topics. First, the Caribbean—how do we define this region and where is it now? The Caribbean is crucial, she said, because it is the beginning of our continent, for the construction of the Americas began in the Caribbean; so the region is important for the world. African descendants are a vital part of Caribbean history. The Caribbean, she concluded, is Africa in America, so it is important to know its characteristics and history. Second, she would discuss the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the histories of the Caribbean and the Americas. This revolution has been misinterpreted by many, but its importance cannot be questioned. She would also discuss with me Cuban history, including the role of the Cuban revolution in the development of Afro-descendants. Finally, she would talk about the broad cultural and economic contributions of Afro-descendants. It was crucial to avoid seeing Afro-descendants simply as victims of slavery; they made tremendous contributions in all walks of life from religion and music to the economy and politics.

She asked if we could break the meeting up so we could go and have lunch. She lives outside Havana and leaves around 7:00 a.m. after a light breakfast, so that by noon she is famished and she cannot operate properly without eating. As we were preparing to leave she said she hoped I was having a good time in Cuba. The country is facing a lot of problems but people are trying. Behind the happiness and dancing that Cubans are fond of, there is a lot of pain; the embargo continues to make life difficult for the government and ordinary people. We all expressed hope that perhaps President Obama would end the nightmare of the embargo.

The embargo caught up with me as we parted for lunch. Rita walked me to the National Hotel for wireless Internet, which I needed so that I could use my laptop to transfer money from my personal account to the joint account, so that Cassandra could send money to Paul to wire it to me from Canada. Built in the 1930s, the National Hotel is a magnificent hotel with a sprawling veranda and manicured gardens reminiscent of hotels of the period before the boxes of modern hotels such as Havana Libre became popular in the postwar period. The fact that they had wireless Internet services made me wish I were staying here instead. The Internet card cost 8 pesos and it could be used for one hour within 30 days of purchase. I promptly logged on and did my banking transactions and e-mailed Cassandra and Paul.

From the National Hotel I took a cab to Professor Castaneda's office to ensure I was not late. I got there earlier than Rita, who had gone for lunch. I found Professor Castaneda waiting by the entrance to the building talking to one of those overeager American teachers from New Orleans who wanted his students to know about the entire black world, not just those in the United States. He knew Romanus Ejiaga, my former colleague at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Professor Castaneda and Rita took me on a guided tour of the University of Havana. They explained the University system in Cuba, including the expansive nature of the University of Havana, which has outposts across many of the island's provinces and municipalities. Havana also has separate universities of engineering, medicine, and so on. The heart of the campus contains impressive buildings, which, with their massive columns, must have been truly imposing in their day. The law school has recently been renovated, but the others, including the building housing the president's and vice-president's offices, is desperately in need of repair. It is a green campus with its huge trees and their massive canopies. Between explaining the various faculty buildings, the two women would relapse into their own private conversation so that the tour took much longer than it should have. The most memorable moment came when we stood by the massive statute of Alma Mater in front of the steps facing the president's offices. Professor Castaneda recounted how as a young girl she would come to visit her uncle who was one of the workers laying the steps. One day when she and her father came to bring him lunch her father declared, "my daughter will one day be a professor here." Professor Castaneda teared up at the memory. There were no black professors in those days, she said. The revolution changed that, although blacks still have a long way to go. That made the tour worth it.

We agreed to meet again tomorrow. Rita had earlier given me a detailed program of activities covering the rest of my stay. I am impressed by her thoroughness. After parting company with the two women, I returned to the hotel to see a doctor. They took my temperature, blood pressure and heart rate. I had a slight fever, the woman said, and I was developing a respiratory condition for which she would prescribe antibiotics. Half an hour later the two doctors came to my room with the medicines. Although it cost me more than \$90, I felt so much better that I would be on proper medication.

I felt buoyant enough to finally write an essay for Ato Quayson's collection on *Fathers and Daughters* to be published by Ayebia. I walked back to the National Hotel to e-mail it and check for messages. The streets were full of young people going to the movies or art shows or simply milling around. One would be hard pressed to distinguish them from youngsters in any of the U.S. or Africa's major cities by their manner of dress—tight jeans and blouses for the women and oversized pants and T-shirts or open-neck shirts for the men—demeanor, and loud playfulness.

I returned just in time for dinner. Unlike last night when I ate at the café adjacent to the hotel, tonight I decided to treat myself with the hotel's sumptuous buffet. I needed to eat well for a quicker recovery!

July 24, 2008

I slept so much better last night and woke up in far better shape than I have been since the weekend. My first appointment was with Professor Castaneda for her first lecture—that's what she prefers to call it—I got to her office right at 10:00 a.m. She asked whether I had brought my laptop, for she had prepared a PowerPoint presentation. I was deeply touched and impressed. I returned to the hotel and a few minutes later I was back with the laptop and I found Rita had also arrived. We went to a small classroom on the first floor. The windows were open and a nice breeze kept us quite comfortable in the non-air-conditioned room.

Her lecture was entitled, "History of the Caribbean: Border and Empires." She began, like all good teachers, with a summary of her lecture, and proceeded to outline her argument and elaborate on that argument. She gave a quote from Juan Bosch's book *De Cristobal Columbus a Fidel Castro, El Caribe Frontera Imperial*, to the effect that the Caribbean is the only place in the world where several empires were destined to meet and fight.

She argued that the Caribbean was a border of empires for four reasons. First, the Caribbean is a fragmented area with multiple aspects of capitalist potential and development. Second, the region exhibits phenomena that are simultaneously diverse and unique. Third, in this region there co-exists, in the same space and at the same time, interrelated and different modes of production. Fourth, the Caribbean created a new culture from different cultures and countries, which was subsequently exported to other countries, including the powerful ones.

She emphasized that historical studies are necessary and indispensable if you want to understand any region or a people. History is the base upon which all characteristics of society are generated. The Caribbean is no different; it is essential to know its history. The historiography of the Caribbean has, of course, evolved. At the beginning it was dominated by historians from the powerful countries. Now, scholars from the region are engaged in producing new interpretations. They have been especially keen to know the history of the subaltern classes such as the slaves.

The history of the Caribbean is extremely complicated. For one thing it involved different imperial powers. In general, it can be explained from three vantage points. First, it involves the history of the struggles of the empires against the peoples of the region in attempts to seize rich lands. Second, it concerns the history of the struggle between or among the empires themselves to establish control over specific areas in the region. Third, it is about the history of the Caribbean people fighting for liberation from the imperialists.

She underscored the centrality of the history of the Caribbean in the history of the Americas with a quote: "The Caribbean has been our first continent before the existence of North America or South America, because the Caribbean area had already begun to function, the magic seat from where all the developments in the Western Hemisphere sprang." The region's transcendental importance extends to several dimensions: geographic,

economic, cultural, geo-political, and also in terms of political strategy, economic strategy, and commercial strategy.

Jose Marti, the great nationalist leader, captured the geographical importance of the Caribbean when he stated, "the Caribbean is very important because it is established between the old and new worlds, but also the different parts of the new world are embedded in the Caribbean." In this context, Marti believed, Cuba and Puerto Rico were particularly important. Their independence would establish equilibrium in the hemisphere. The independence of the Antilles was necessary to avoid conflicts between the U.S. and the Caribbean, which would help preserve the dignity of the North American republic. The Caribbean, she stressed, is in the center, the seat from where it all began.

Economically, the Caribbean has a lot of natural resources, including minerals such as bauxite, oil, diamonds, uranium, and agricultural products of sugar, bananas, citrus, spices, lumber, and of course human capital. Politically, the region has supported different systems and patterns of international relations. You have territories owned by the U.S., France, the UK, and Holland, as well as independent countries, some of which are in a neo-colonial relationship. You have republics like Haiti, constitutional monarchies like Jamaica, and Cuba, which is socialist.

For the remainder of the lecture she focused on the pioneers of Caribbean historiography. As she talked she would peer at me over her glasses to make sure I was following. I felt like I was back in school. Rita took notes diligently: I wasn't quite sure whether this was out of respect or the information was new—I doubt if the latter was the case. Occasionally, the two of them would get into a conversation in Spanish, which Rita would try to translate—often an elaboration of the points on the PowerPoint notes. As she proceeded, Professor Castaneda pulled a cold bottle of tonic water from her bag, which she occasionally sipped. We were disturbed only once by the American I had met yesterday, Warren Jones, I later found out was his name. She firmly told him to wait until noon as they had agreed and he walked away to wait in the corridors.

She discussed four scholars, two of whom had been her teachers. The first was José Luciano Franco Ferrrán (1891–1989), who established the first course on the history of the Caribbean in the University. He recognized Cuba as a Caribbean country and his book entitled *The History of the Haitian Revolution* is a classic. He founded the historiographical movement for the study of slavery in Cuba. The second was Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980) who was her professor for three years. She smiled as she talked about him; he was a true Renaissance scholar—he taught cultural history, philosophy, literature, dance, and music. He founded a national publishing house that published the classics. When he won the Cervantes Prize, he used the prize money to publish a collection of classic artists, which was distributed across the island. He loved Haiti and, like all smart Cuban intellectuals, he loved the Caribbean. His most important books include *El Reino de este Mundo* and *El Siglo de las Luces*. He died in Paris where he was appointed to serve in the Cuban embassy. The third was Pelegrin Torras who became Vice President for External Relations/Foreign Affairs. He taught courses on colonialism and underdevelopment in Latin America and the Caribbean and the contemporary history of the Caribbean. Finally, there was René Depestre, of Haitian descent, who is a poet and a professor, and teaches a postgraduate course, "the fundamentals and evolution of the negritude movement," and is the author of *Buenos días ye adios a la negritude*.

That was it for today, she concluded, as if dismissing a class. She quizzed me, again, whether my computer was free of viruses as I removed her zip drive from the computer.

I assured her it was. She smiled. Next time we will discuss the definition of the Caribbean, she said. I can't wait for her discussion of Cuban history.

I briefly talked to Warren in the corridor. He promised to introduce me to an Afro-Cuban filmmaker who had done a documentary on the 1912 massacres in Cuba and would try to get me invited to a party on Saturday which was organized by the Caribbean Association as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. We exchanged hotel information.

The next appointment was at 2:00. I trotted to the National Hotel to check e-mail. Cassandra had wired the money to Paul, while Francesca Gaiba at UIC assured me I should be getting my research money for Cuba deposited in my account soon. I felt a lot better about the financial situation.

The second meeting was at Radio Havana. Rita had suggested we meet in the hotel lobby at 1:45 p.m. since Radio Havana was close to the hotel. I was late by about five minutes, for when I returned to the hotel from the National Hotel I found a live broadcast of Obama's visit to Berlin where he was scheduled to address a huge rally estimated at about 200,000. Obama walked to the stage with his trademark smile, like a rock star in a suit. As he does with most of his major speeches he read stirringly from a prompter. There was nothing new in what he said, of course, but it was a great performance nonetheless.

I was greatly disappointed with what I saw of Radio Havana. The building was run down. We registered at the front desk and we were given visitor badges. We took the lone elevator to the sixth floor where we were led down a floor of winding metal stairs to the Creole department for our meeting with the head, Hilario Balista Felix. His parents are both Haitian—his father was born in Haiti while his mother is first generation Haitian Cuban. He was born in Guantanamo province. As we went to see him, Rita talked highly of him as a leading journalist and broadcaster.

After a brief introduction by Rita, Hilario discussed the work of his department. He noted that Creole is the second language of the Caribbean, spoken by millions of people in the region including Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Cuba, where it is the island's second language. Its base is French. In the eastern part of the island, where Creole is spoken most widely, many learn Creole first and Spanish second. Because of east-west migration, Creole communities exist in Havana as well. The spread of Creole in Cuba is connected to the strong immigration of Haitians from the nineteenth century. After the Haitian Revolution, many French plantation owners immigrated to Cuba with their slaves. Haitian migrations to Cuba continued thereafter, each connected to difficulties in Haiti and opportunities in Cuba. The Caribbean islands and groups that speak Creole belong to the Bannzil Kreyol Kiba, an organization whose objectives is to preserve Creole culture as manifested in language, hairstyles, food, dance, and music through various avenues and organizing festivals.

The Creole department of Radio Havana transmits to the entire Caribbean as well as to Central and South America. Their primary objective is to transmit Cuba's revolutionary perspectives. It is the voice of Cuba in Creole. The programs consist largely of news, both national and international, cultural programming, especially music, including Cuban, Haitian, and other Caribbean genres. Feedback from listeners in the region is quite good, for people seem to appreciate getting a fresh Cuban perspective. Radio Havana also broadcasts in English, French, and some native languages spoken in Central and South America such as Quecha. The English service is beamed to Africa as well; so is the Portuguese service. There is also an Arabic service.

I wanted to know more about relations between Caribbean immigrants, including Haitians, and other Afro-Cubans. He said relations are good. There has been a lot of intermarriage. The Caribbean Association is trying to bring everybody together. It has also been working on promoting dual citizenship for Cubans of Haitian and Jamaican descent. The latter do much to help their countries of origin by going back to assist periodically and encouraging the Cuban government to maintain good relations with these countries, which it does. He promised to give me a file with more information on some of these issues.

I was beginning to feel tired by this time, with little energy to pursue some of his leads. Hilario talked briefly about how the imperialists initially tried to control Cuba's access to the Internet and enforce an external blockade of the media, except, of course for their own propaganda beamed to Cuba. I remarked, rather lamely, on the presence of a Caribbean diaspora in Cuba, that Cuba's Afro-descended population was more complex than I thought. Rita commented that Cuba is in the Caribbean and the Caribbean is in Cuba and she seemed mighty pleased with this formulation.

Hilario walked us out. A slim, dark-bearded man of above-average height, he seemed pleased with the visit. He showed us other departments and walked us back to the sixth floor where there was a party. It was an office party for the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, Rita whispered. When our presence was recognized as we tried to pass through the crowded corridor to the elevator, one of the organizers invited us to join. Hilario kindly picked up drinks for us, but we declined the food. I noted that the crowd was largely mulatto and white, the same as I had noticed among the attendants at my hotel and at the National Hotel. Where are the blacks that you see all over the streets, I began to wonder? I now appreciate what both Rita and Professor Castaneda have been trying to tell me: for all of its revolutionary advances and rhetoric, blacks still have a long way to go in Cuban society. And here the term *black* is reserved for non-mulattoes.

When I got back to the hotel I took a nap, after which I read the magazines I had bought in Chicago—*Ebony*, which has become a celebrity tabloid, *The New Yorker*, with its tasteless cover of Obama and his wife Michelle as terrorists in the White House, and *The Economist*, on the continuing economic crisis in the U.S. which is now spreading to Europe. Then I trekked back to the National Hotel to check e-mail. If I had I known, I would have booked at the National Hotel. There was hardly any price difference between the two hotels.

I decided to take an early night to expedite my recovery. But the afternoon nap played tricks with my sleep, so I went back to reading, this time *Small Island*, which is getting rather tedious in terms of organization, in which the four main characters are largely discussed separately in their own chapters. It seems clever and indeed even necessary at first as a way of introducing them, but now I am getting impatient to see the intersections of their lives and narratives.

July 25, 2008

This was a day spent sampling the delight of Old Havana and Cuba's old and contemporary cultures. Rita was half an hour late, she had been doing the family's laundry, she said. As I waited for her, the lobby was a fascinating spectacle of tourism, mostly white faces, the anxious Europeans eager for some tropical fun, the gregarious Latinos already

having fun, the families with listless teenagers, the newlyweds lustily holding hands, the male sex tourists with skimpily dressed Cuban women, the unhappy couples walking a safe distance apart, the conference attendees dressed too warmly for the climate and too formally for the season, the young pretty women hoping for some luck with a lonely visitor, the matronly women keen to assert their class differences, the list was endless.

Old Havana is perhaps three to four kilometers from the hotel. We first went to the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba, which is next to Saratoga Hotel, itself almost opposite the Capitol building which is an exact, smaller, replica of the U.S. Capitol building. It was built during the American occupation, Rita said. Now it houses some government offices and commercial offices. The large square around it serves as a transportation hub for buses going to the countryside and there is a park adjacent to the Capitol. There is a faded ambience to the place.

The Yoruba Association and Museum is housed in a handsome, recently renovated building. It hosts a gallery, shop, restaurant, and offices; large, open space for performances and, of course, the museum which takes up much of the second floor. I didn't know what to expect so I was duly impressed by the museum. It is spacious and well designed. With its white tiles, blue timber ceiling, and huge representations of Orishas, each statue placed in front of huge paintings of the national phenomenon the Orisha represents, the museum achieves its desired effect of transporting the visitor into a sacred space of remarkable tranquility and power. We began the tour by visiting a table with seven small glasses and one big glass adorned with candles and flowers. Our guide, a middle-aged woman with a handsome face and wearing a cream suit, explained in halting English the meaning of the contents on the table and later of the different Orishas. She explained that the Spanish had tried to destroy Yoruba religion, but they couldn't because the spirit was within and it survived the destruction of physical materials associated with the religion. The Africans were able to subvert Catholicism using Catholic saints and symbols to represent the Orishas. Out of this syncretization, a word she used a lot and which was used repeatedly in the descriptions of each Orisha, Yoruba religion survived and changed into a powerful expression of Cuban religiosity.

More than 30 Orishas are represented in the museum. The sculptors visited Nigeria to ensure accurate representation of each Orisha. Beside each Orisha there is a full description in Spanish, English, and French about the power that each represents, its attributes, its syncretic expression in terms of Catholic saints associated with it, and the dates when it is celebrated. I took copious notes out of fascination with this complex pantheon of Yoruba religion. The Orishas include Elegna, Echu, Ogun, Osun, Ochosi, Nana Buruku, Ochun, Yemaya, Olukuni, Olosa, Inle, Algayu, Oba, Oyo, Ori, Orunmila, Osani, the twins Bromu and Broncia, Olodumari—represented by white silk cloth as the god of all religions and the embodiment of the three components of celestial life—Ochumare, Oduduwa, Egbe, Oranmiyan, Yenda, Obabufon, Orichaoko, the twin children, children for Los Beyis, Obatala, Chango, and Obaluaye. The Orishas represent an elaborate cosmology; collectively they embody all human existence and social life. And there was a display of the complex Oracle of Ifa and the *canastillero*, a cabinet typically found in homes of Yoruba followers containing materials representing the different Orishas. I was deeply impressed by the profound understanding and projection of nature and humanity displayed by the Orishas and the way this knowledge has been preserved and developed over centuries of slavery and colonialism. It was a staggering religious and historical achievement.

It took us more than an hour and half to go through the museum. Afterwards we were allowed to talk to the Babalawo who runs the Association. A puffy man with olive, Mediter-

raneean skin and straight black hair, he spoke at rapid-fire speed without being asked any questions. Yoruba religion, he said emphatically, represents African culture. Africa is the first civilization of humanity. Even the fossil record, and now genetics, has proven it. This religion, a beautiful religion, as he called it, originated in the sacred city of Ile-Ife. It is the first human religion, which developed long before Christianity and Islam. The religion came to Cuba in the eighteenth century where it developed into a Cuban religion with an African base. The changes were forced by the influences and pressures of Spanish colonialism and Catholicism, but the fundamental elements remained African. Today, its influence in Cuba remains widespread. While perhaps 15% of Cuba's 11 million people are not religious, 75% of the remaining 85% believe in Orishas. The country is full of Yoruba religious believers, many of whom can be identified by their clothing, bracelets, and the fact that they attend ceremonies and festivals. Many do not see any conflict between following both Catholicism and Yoruba religion. Both religions are syncretic in Cuba reflecting mutual appropriations and accommodations during slavery.

I wanted to know more about Cuban innovations and connections in the diaspora and with Africa. He noted that they have direct links with 45 institutions around the world. In the diaspora they have particularly strong links with Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago where there are strong Yoruba communities. The most important links with Africa are maintained with Nigeria, the homeland of the religion through mutual visits and exchanges. The innovations came out of proscription of the religion, syncretism, and reorganization of spiritual and ritual practices.

Clearly a passionate man, Babalawo Antonio Castaneda Marquetry spoke with the zeal of a man of faith, of a proselytizer. He was prone, as such people sometimes are, to making some statement that could be considered outrageous in other circumstances. Africa was not only the original homeland of humanity, but Yoruba was the world's oldest religion, he maintained. He talked at length about the fact that blacks can give birth to albinos, not the other way round, as proof that whites came from blacks. Faith doesn't always resonate with reason, notwithstanding all the efforts of countless theologians to prove the contrary, so I didn't think it any of my business to question him about some of his dubious claims. I was of course more interested in understanding the survival and development of the religions brought by the enslaved Africans. Clearly, Yoruba religion has survived and developed new forms and become transnationalized across the diaspora and between the diaspora and Africa including its original homeland in present-day Nigeria. Babalawo Marquetry stressed that African influences in Cuba affect all aspects of art, music, and dance, that culturally Cuba is an African country with a Spanish gloss.

For the next two hours, Rita took me on a guided tour of Old Havana. We walked down Calle Obispo beginning at the corner where La Florida bar and restaurant is located, renowned for being one of Ernest Hemingway's hangouts. Americans love to come here, she said. Later she showed me another of Hemingway's hangouts, a tiny little bar, which was congested with tourists, near the Plaza de la Catedral.

The streets were as narrow as those in any old city established before the invention of the motor car, each with the kind of intimacy between shopping, working, living, and leisure spaces that make such neighborhoods both crowded and convivial. The buildings bear sad signs of prolonged neglect and squalid living, but several are being renovated, especially museums, hotels, schools—including the original site of the University of Havana established in 1728—and those fronting the numerous plazas.

The first plaza we stopped by was the Plaza de la Catedral with its huge, old church, and then we walked to the La Maestranza with its playgrounds and impressive views of the harbor and kiosks selling tourist goods. As we walked from the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, built like all those monuments of Old Havana, by African slave labor, Rita said ruefully, toward the statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, father of the nation who fought for independence and freed the slaves, a band of musicians was playing the well-known tune, "Gwantamera." At the end, one of the singers flashed me his hat for a tip, which I gave rather reluctantly given my current financial situation. I changed \$120 this morning, which came to 96 pesos. Now I have \$260 remaining. If the money Paul sent doesn't come on time, I am doomed. Then we were on Mercaderes Street on the Plaza de San Francisco with its church and the nearby Havana harbor, then to La Plaza Vieja before returning to Fraternity Park by the Capitol. Except for the tourists, Old Havana looked blacker than the areas near the hotel where I am staying. Rita insisted that Cuba remained a largely white and mulatto-dominated country despite all the positive changes made since the revolution.

We returned to the Yoruba Association at 3:00 p.m. to witness a religious ceremony connected to one of the Orishas. But it wasn't until three quarters of an hour later that the ceremony began. We went back to the museum where several baskets of fruit—bananas, paw paws and watermelons—had been placed in front of the Orisha concerned. Three muscular men with ceremonial drums draped in colorful beads resting on shiny cloths on their laps were drumming to the Orisha. They drummed for more than half an hour, shifting from one chant to another, one tempo to another, without losing a beat as beads of sweat enveloped their bare shoulders and furrowed brows. Several of us watched the ceremony in respectful silence.

Then we went back to the first floor where the open part of the ceremony was conducted. This consisted of singing to each of the 20 Orishas, each to a particular sound that required a distinctive dance reflecting the characteristic movement of the Orisha. I watched Rita and others, including several young men and women, shake, swing, shuffle, gyrate, twist, and wiggle their bodies, arms, legs, and heads with subdued rhythmic movements to each song. I found myself shaking to the drums, to the intoxicating beat of Yoruba ritual.

The taxi dropped me off at the hotel at 5:30 p.m. Rita volunteered to come back at 9:00 p.m. if I wanted so she could take me to a political meeting down the road where Fidel Castro had once lived and started planning the revolution. I felt I had already taken too much of her time for the day so I politely declined. But at 9:00 I walked there myself. I had expected a large crowd, but there were hardly two dozen people there, so I walked back to the hotel and sat in the lobby watching the scene. Seeing all the people dressed for the evening out, I decided to go to the nightclub on the 25th story of the hotel. The club opens at 10:30 and I was a little too early, so I went to the opposite end where there is a restaurant which claims to be the best in Havana. The arrangements and the stunning views clearly indicated this was not an idle boast.

The nightclub was elegant and showed night-lit Havana in its glory. Young couples took photos of the night sky before cuddling at their tables. It seemed young, beautiful Havana was out in full force tonight. The music videos showing on the large TV monitors were Latin pop and hip hop—Jennifer Lopez, Marc Anthony, Ricky Martin, all singing in Spanish—and many more stars I had never heard of. The show started at midnight. The first half hour we were treated to a fashion show by impossibly beautiful women and

men, mostly black, or rather black and mulatto, all tall with sculpted, pretty faces and bodies chiseled to perfection. Whoever coined the term *black is beautiful* surely referred to these young people strutting their fine selves in front of us. When the band came on and started playing, the thrill of the evening suddenly dissipated for me and I only ended up staying for a few songs before returning to my room.

July 26, 2008

This is the day of the great 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, one of the Americas' three most important revolutions—the first, the American Revolution; the second, the Haitian Revolution. The first was for the white settlers, the second for the enslaved Africans, the third for the working peoples, each representing a higher order of freedom, of emancipatory possibilities. The Cuban Revolution has scored some impressive achievements, despite the unrelenting hostility from the United States with its criminal embargo, especially as everyone knows in improving health and education for the masses of the Cuban people. And for those of us from Southern Africa, Cuba was an indispensable ally in the liberation of the sub-region, in preserving Angola from apartheid South Africa's onslaught, in breaking the back of the South African military at Cuito Cuanavale, which helped pave the way for the liberation of Namibia and the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa itself. Who can forget Cuba's internationalist solidarity and assistance in sending doctors, technicians and teachers to Africa and other countries in the developing world? But Cuba has not overcome its racial inequalities, nor has it developed a vibrant economy as the decay of large parts of Havana bears ample testimony. There is no escaping the fact that this is a dictatorship ruled by two brothers for the past 50 years; this is a system inimical to democratic governance and political freedoms. One wonders how sustainable the revolution will prove after the Castros have gone.

I gather the main events are being held in Santiago. I hoped to see some of the events in Havana but am unable to find anyone who could point me to any, so I spent a rather quiet day finishing reading *Small Island*. In the end, I have to say it offers a powerful indictment of postwar immigrant Britain, unflinching in its portrayal of the pathologies and pettiness of both the citizens of the metropole represented by Queenie and Bernard, and the subjects from the colonies represented by Hortense and Gilbert. But the story is leavened with humor and each character is redeemed by their full humanity. And the end is a thrill of a surprise: the birth and the adoption. Quite satisfying, I must say, despite my earlier misgivings.

After the novel, it was back to the National Hotel where I answered tons of e-mail messages, worked on the department's annual report, and sent it back to Carla and Trina. The evening was blissfully quiet, although I could hear music somewhere in the city, at times drums tearing through the languid night air with their pulsating joy, then rumba and other Cuban music coming from clubs, most likely celebrating the 50th anniversary of the revolution. If the crowds I see in the streets are any guide, especially the young people in the self-indulgently decadent way they dress, this is socialism with a Caribbean face, with a cultural exuberance that was probably lacking in the former Soviet Union, Cuba's erstwhile patron. Perhaps this is why it has indeed survived and outlived Soviet and eastern European socialism.

July 27, 2008

We visited the Museum of the Revolution and an Afro-Cuban community center today. Rita came on time at 10:00 and she found me waiting for her in the lobby. We took a taxi back to Old Havana where the museum is located in the former government palace where Cuban presidents, including Batista, worked.

As you enter this once-opulent building, you face the bust of Jose Marti, the independence hero (1853–1895). Behind him are bullet holes from an attack by a group of students who wanted to assassinate the dictator, Fulgencio Batista on March 13, 1957. After buying entrance tickets we walked up the marble staircase to the mirror room, an elegant room full of mirrors and magnificent chandeliers and frescos in the high ceilings where receptions were held. Like the rest of the building, it all looks worn. We saw the balcony facing the square outside and the sea in the distance where Castro gave one of his early speeches when he seized power. During the speech a bomb went off and, according to Rita, that's when a decision was made to create Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in each block throughout the country in 1959. The CDRs also provide other social services and liaise with local and municipal governments.

The Presidential Office, used from 1920–1965, looked rather modest and the original blue leather furniture was still there. The walls are decorated by some of Cuba's most famous artists. Then we went into the Chamber of the Council of Ministers in which the original long table and chairs where the ministers and presidents used to meet are preserved. On one wall stands a large painting of the first assembly led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes who established what is regarded as the first revolutionary movement. Following the revolution, Cuba's new leaders used to meet in this chamber and it was here they decided on some of the sweeping changes they introduced.

From here we went to the third floor where Cuban history is presented along the three periods according to Cuban revolutionary historiography, each further subdivided into different epochs marked by particular leaders and events. The first period was the Colonial era. As elsewhere in the Caribbean and the Americas it began with the Spanish conquest characterized by the genocide of the native peoples, followed by the importation of enslaved Africans. During the conquest, the Indians resisted and there is a haunting sketch of one of their main leaders, Hatuey, who was captured and burned alive. This was followed by slavery, the importation of enslaved Africans, upon whose labor the colonial plantation economy was built. Sugar was the largest industry. The numbers of enslaved Africans grew from 4,000 in 1600 to 841,590 in 1792; and began to drop to 286,942 in 1827 and 44,866 in 1862. The depictions of slave life are harrowing—the shackles and floggings. The slaves worked 15–17 hours a day on the sugar plantations. They were of course not passive, as there were numerous slave uprisings, revolts, and escapes.

The next phase in the Colonial era commemorated in the museum focuses on what is called the first national liberation war, the 10-year war that started October 10, 1868 against Spanish rule and combined a national, anti-colonial, and anti-slavery struggle. It was led by Cuban landowners who were protesting the worsening colonial metropolitan relations. The war contributed to the abolition of slavery in 1886. The museum depicts the colonialists' maneuvers, led by General Arsenio Martinez Campos, and the heroism of Cuba's nationalist leaders, among them the legendary Afro-Cuban military leader Antonio Maceo, who refused to sign a peace treaty with Spain, and Jose Marti. The war of 1895 followed and is characterized as marking the beginning of the Cuban revolutionary

movement. There is a wonderful picture of the three Cuban leaders, Martí, Maceo, and Maximo Gomez. At the Battle of Paralejo on July 13, 1895, the Spanish forces, led by General Campos, were defeated. Spain's economy and military power were destroyed and the power of the independent government strengthened between 1895–1896.

Unfortunately, Maceo was killed on July 12, 1896, during a military campaign. The Spanish brought more troops. Following the Cuban victory over Spain, the U.S. intervened. The Spanish-Cuban-American war is considered the first imperialist war in history, according to the exhibition. It led to the temporary frustration of Cuba's independence and the materialization of the U.S. expansionist interests on the island. The U.S. used the explosion of their ship, the USS Maine, in Havana harbor to enter the war on February 15, 1898. By the end of the war 400,000 people had been killed, 100,000 of them children, and whereas there were 1,000 sugar factories before the war, only 207 were working afterwards.

The second period is the Republican era. The U.S. military occupation of Cuba began January 1, 1899, and lasted until May 20, 1902, when what is called the neo-colonial republic was born. Cuba was forced to sign a series of unfair treaties—one on trade reciprocity, another on the construction of a U.S. naval base, and the last, a permanent treaty guaranteeing U.S. interests. Several illustrious Cuban nationalists are represented in this section of the museum, among them two Afro-Cubans. The first is Juan Gualberto Gómez Ferrer (1854–1933) an eminent black journalist who dedicated himself to defending Cuba. He was deported several times to Ceuta, Spain, and each time he returned he participated in nationalist activities including the war of independence. He was later appointed to the Cuban Assembly and Constitutional Assembly in 1901 and served as a senator. The other was Quintín Banderas Betancourt (1833–1908), a black military hero who was deported to a jail in Chafarinas Islands off the coast of Morocco. He became a brigadier during the war of 1895.

Cuba's independence in 1902 was severely limited by the treaties and the Platt Amendment. The 1910s were a period of revolutionary ferment in Latin America and elsewhere in the world: there was the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Argentina University Reform Movement started in 1918. These developments influenced Cuban intellectuals. Some of them formed the Minority Group, among them Julio Mella McFarland and Carlos Benigno Baliño y Lopez who founded the Cuban Communist Party. The neo-colonial order reached its authoritarian apogees under the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado y Morales (1925–1933) and later Batista (1952–1958). Cuba continued to be gravely impacted by international developments and crises such as the Great Depression. The 1930s, the historiography of the museum continues, constituted one of the most outstanding periods of Cuban people's struggles for liberation, led by the proletariat, students, peasants, and the lower middle classes and expressed through strikes and demonstrations.

The principal organizations are divided into three groups: first, bourgeois associations, students groups, and left wing groups including the Communist Party and trade unions. On August 12, 1933 there was a general strike to end the dictatorship. Batista first emerged during this period when he feigned support for the progressive forces. Between September 10, 1933 and January 15, 1934, Cuba had a revolutionary government, the *100 Days Government* as it is called. Several memorable intellectuals emerged during this time who carried the torch of Cuban revolutionary thought, among them Rubén Martínez Villena (1899–1934) and Antonio Guiteras Holmes (1905–1935) who served in the 100 Days Government as Secretary of the Interior. A major black leader of workers and communists was Blas Roca Calderío (1908–1987) who served as General Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party in 1934–1965 and later as President of the National Assembly of People's

Power in 1976–1981. As the international situation continued to deteriorate with the rise of Nazism, Cubans became involved in progressive internationalist movements. More than a thousand fought in the Spanish Civil War and participated in anti-fascist causes.

After the Second World War, the world slid into the Cold War while in Cuba the socioeconomic situation deteriorated and protests mounted, many of which were spearheaded by trade unions and students. Among the most important union leaders was Jesús Menéndez Larrondo (1911–1948), the black General Secretary of the Sugar Workers National Federation and a House Representative of the Peoples Socialist Party; and Aracelio Iglesias Díaz (1901–1948), also black and General Secretary of the Maritime Workers Federation of Havana and a House Representative of the Socialist Party who was murdered on October 17, 1948. Among the most prominent of the student leaders was Fidel Castro Ruz. He was born in Biran, Holguin Province on August 12, 1926. His father was from Galicia, Spain while his mother was Cuban. He studied law and accountancy at the University of Havana and became vice-president of the student union. He joined the Cuban Peoples Party and graduated in 1950 as a lawyer.

By the 1950s the situation in Cuba had become quite dismal. According to the 1953 census, 40,939 people died from lack of medical care; there were 200,000 shacks and miserable huts; the country lacked industry; 4.4 million children had no education and only 50% went to school; lack of opportunities forced many women into prostitution; gambling was rampant. At this time came Batista's coup of 1952 which received imperialist support. The coup succeeded with the connivance and intervention of the bourgeois parties. In contrast, the Students Federation issued a declaration against the coup four days after it had taken place, and Fidel Castro wrote a scathing appraisal of the conditions that had given rise to the coup of April 6, 1952. From the Cuban youth, the official historiography displayed in the museum declares, emerged the vanguard of the revolution which guided the nation to reorganize itself for a final revolutionary assault on the decadent neo-colonial order. Students began to actively organize against the dictatorship. Preparations were made for an assault in Santiago.

The rest of the museum, the largest part of the exhibition, is devoted to the liberation war, 1953–1958. By this time we were sweating profusely, for there was no air conditioning and the open windows merely circulated the warm air from outside. Rita would occasionally sit to catch her breath and let me read the translated captions by myself before joining me to add her own commentary, often emphasizing what was important to remember. Many of the people in the museum looked like Cuban students and looked at me with surprise and bemusement as I nodded intently to Rita's English commentaries and took notes.

The exhibit goes on some length to explain the strategies and tactics of mobilization used by the revolutionaries. On July 26, 1953, 185 revolutionaries attacked the Moncada Barracks and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Garrisons in Santiago. The attacks were unsuccessful, but showed the nation that the *Centennial Generation*, so named in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Martí's birth, was infused with the spirit of national liberation. The attack of Moncada marked the beginning of the end of the Batista dictatorship and led to the creation of the July 26th movement that would spearhead the revolution. Another garrison had been attacked in Bayamo City and it, too, failed. The attackers were captured, some killed, and others brought to trial, among them Fidel Castro. Castro was saved from possible murder by a black officer in the Batista army, Sr. Pedro Manuel Sarria Tartabull (1900–1972), who joined the rebel army in 1959.

Castro defended himself during the trial. When asked who the leader of the revolt was, he apparently replied that it was José Martí. He and others were later released from prison.

The intervention of the President of Mexico played a role in securing their release. But this was followed by a ruthless period of police brutality during which there was widespread torture and killings of revolutionaries. The torture instruments, and the pictures of tortured and murdered victims were chilling to watch.

A new phase in the revolution started in November 1956 when the yacht called *Granma*, originally built in 1943 for a maximum 20 passengers, sailed from Tuxpan, Mexico on November 25 for Cuba with 82 men led by Castro to restart the liberation war. It landed at Los Cayuelos, in eastern Cuba, on December 2, 1956. Castro had met Ché Guevara in Mexico. The first front of the liberation war was opened in Sierra Maestra. In the meantime, the liberation movement was developed and consolidated in the cities. Predictably, the U.S. offered support to the Batista dictatorship. In 1958 two new fronts were opened, one named *Frank Pais* and led by Raul Castro and the other named *Mario Muñoz*, led by Ché Guevara. The final front to be opened was front *Simon Bolivar*. The liberation war moved progressively from east to west. It was accompanied by growing protests in the cities. The war was spearheaded by the 26th of July Movement led by Fidel Castro. Other movements that participated included the Revolutionary Movement, the Student Revolutionary Directorate of 13 March, the Socialist Popular Party, and National Front of Escambray. Whenever an area was liberated, a new governance and civil structure was established for administration and provision of social services, including education and health. The final decisive battle came on November 20–30, the Battle of Guisa, where the Batista forces were vanquished. Batista fled to Santo Domingo on January 1, 1959, carrying several million dollars with him. The liberation war cost 20,000 lives. The U.S., as ever, tried to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat by attempting to establish a provisional government in order, the caption read, to take away the triumph of the revolution. This marked the end, Rita proclaimed, of four and half centuries of colonial and neo-colonial domination in Cuba. The revolutionary period, the third period in Cuba's history, is the period we are defending right now, she said with unmistakable passion. Yesterday was the 50th anniversary of the Moncada attack.

The remaining rooms had murals of some of the key leaders and one room was dedicated to the memories of Ché Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos Gorriarán who died soon after the revolution in a plane crash and who had been one of Castro's top lieutenants. Outside the museum, there is an annex where a replica of the *Granma* is kept. There is also an external flame to the revolutionaries who died in the liberation war, as well as war memorabilia including boats and bombers used in the American-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion, the downed U-2 spy plane during the missile crisis of 1962, and Cuban tanks and military hardware including the jeep used by Castro and tanks built by workers to defend the revolution.

We spent three and a half hours and by the end I felt I knew the broad outlines of Cuba's political history. Now, I need this filled in with the narrative of the Afro-Cuban experience.

The visit to the Afro-Cuban cultural community in Cayoweso in Central Havana brought a forceful reminder of the vibrancy of Afro-Cuban culture and the indomitable spirit and survival of African music and dance. At the entrance I saw Warren Jones, who seemed surprised to see me but failed to apologize for not getting in touch yesterday as he had promised. There were also two brothers from Nigeria who remarked that I was wearing a Ghanaian shirt. One lives in Atlanta and the other in the Cayman Islands. We laughed at the joke about Africans scattered everywhere. The narrow walkway was packed

with Afro-Cubans and tourists seeking a taste of the Afro-Cuban cultural experience so that we had difficulty making our way. We finally got into a house converted into a gallery where I perused some astonishing paintings by Ronaldo, the owner of the gallery who I met before we left and who agreed to be interviewed next Tuesday. According to Rita, he is one of Havana's most prominent artists worth talking to. When we met him, he revealed that he has been invited to exhibit his work in Chicago and that one of his paintings was donated to Senator Obama last March and he joked that he would love to paint him in the White House. I left a 10-peso deposit for a painting that immediately struck me with its expressive power.

The real joy of the afternoon was the music and dancing in the compound, where we were led by a short, cheerful woman who obviously knows Rita very well, and we were given seats to listen and watch the performance. We came in when a male band was singing. They were beating the drums with frenzied energy while the vocalists belted out some African language, maybe Yoruba. Like at the Yoruba ceremony on Friday, the songs called for different body movements. An eight-year-old girl and a teenage boy danced with agile rhythm in movements that were astounding. The young girl shook and moved her body with breathtaking style and sensuality that at the same time avoided being sexualized; we were all left with our mouths open in wonder and admiration and clapped rapturously at the end of each song. Occasionally her mother would join her in shaking her ample behind, and so would a slightly younger girl who tried her best to emulate with such endearing charm. That turned out to be a teaser. When a women's group took over, the drumming, singing, and the dancing exploded like thunder.

The women, about eight of them, took turns singing, dancing, and playing the drums, rattles and other instruments. They were accompanied by a man dressed in all white from shoes to cap. I swear I forgot I was in Cuba. The movements, the intoxicating shaking of the bottoms, the playfulness between the man and the women reminded me of traditional dances in Malawi. They call it rumba here. The dancers invited the audience to join. I did at one point, so did Rita. I, the African, was stiffer than they were. I blame it on age and wearing sandals. Africa was alive and well in the veins of its Cuban sons and daughters. Later when I got to the hotel, I could hear in the distance the drums of Africa pulsating with their seductive rhythms in the night. Except for the insufferable white tourists taking pictures, the crowds could have been anywhere in rural Africa, the old women shaking their aged hips on their chairs, the flamboyant youngsters trying to show off, and the older ones with their suggestive gyrations.

It was when the music ended that we went into the artist's yard to arrange for a meeting with him next week. It turned out we were not too far from the hotel, so Rita and I parted ways as she went to catch a bus home and I walked back to the hotel. It turned out the hotel served as a residence of Castro and his top lieutenants in the early days after coming to Havana following the revolution, and as the location of the first Soviet embassy. I had seen but not walked by the historical pictures in the lobby. The pictures proclaimed some of the achievements of the revolution: elimination of illiteracy within a year, universal health care, which has resulted in life expectancy of 74, advances in science and technology. These achievements seemed to jar with the bombed-out appearances of the buildings on the taxi ride from the museum to the cultural center and the walk from the cultural center to the hotel. Clearly, the Cuban Revolution is still very much a work in progress.

July 28, 2008

I returned to a lecture with Professor Digna Castaneda at 10:00 a.m. The lecture lasted two and a half hours. Before starting we waited for Rita, who found us chatting in the classroom. Before the latter turned up I was a little taken aback when the professor asked if I could help her get to an expensive Latin America Studies Association conference in Rio de Janeiro. She was giving a paper at the conference. I mumbled that I knew a couple of people in Rio, who perhaps I could link her to. What else could I say? Rita came when the professor was giving me her three e-mail addresses where I could copy her to any contacts I made. I was relieved with Rita's arrival.

Today's lecture was divided into two parts. The first was on the definition of the Caribbean, the second on the history of the Caribbean. I thought we spent too much time on the first and that things started getting interesting when we were done with the definitions. But out of respect, I didn't interrupt her for her to hurry along.

She noted that there were many definitions of the Caribbean. She argued that Caribbean intellectuals have been debating and discussing the geographical and cultural boundaries of the Caribbean for a long time, ever since the independence of countries in the region began. For the English-speaking countries, independence started in 1962. There are, of course, Caribbean countries that have yet to gain their independence. These debates and discussions have been part of efforts to confirm national and regional identities.

She quoted definitions advanced by four authors. The first by Shridath Ramphal, the former Commonwealth Secretary General from 1972, in which he stated: "The Caribbean is like a concentric circle each one bigger than the other. The first circle consists of Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba; the second consists of the former British and Dutch colonies and the other territories still under colonial rule; and the third bigger circle consists of the states of Central and South America that border the Caribbean Sea and have Caribbean islands." She gave the example of Venezuela, which has Caribbean islands, the same as Colombia. She recounted her visit to the Colombian island of St. Andres, which is inhabited by people from other Caribbean islands such as St. Vincent and those that arrived directly from Africa. They are called *raisales* and they are a well-educated, pretty people, she said. She attended a four-hour church service in a black Baptist church when she was there and she was struck that the sermon was in English. She discovered that the inhabitants of the island were bilingual in both Spanish and English from childhood and they retained English as a way of maintaining a distinctive identity.

The second definition was from a Polish geographer, Andrezej Dembitz who said in 1979, "We understand the Caribbean region as an integrated one, connecting all the places bordering the Caribbean Sea (including El Salvador, for cultural reasons) from Mexico to French Guyana, all the entities of the Antilles plus the Bahamas." Then she quoted a statement made in 2000 by Lloyd Best, an economist, that one of the fundamental features of the Caribbean is the plantation system that determines the social, political, and economic characteristics of the region. Finally, she had a quote from Norman Girvan from Trinidad and Tobago who in 2000 talked of the Caribbean in terms of its future trajectory. "The Caribbean of tomorrow will not be an Anglophone or Spanish conception; it will not be linked exclusively to a geographic space or one definition. It will be more than that. It will be a community that shares strategic economic, social, and political interests, that includes different languages, cultural expressions and the Caribbean diaspora." According to Professor Castaneda, underpinning the transnational connections and cooperation

will be cultural interactions that are far more important than geographic location in the Caribbean Sea.

Then her presentation outlined what she called the multiple denominations and dimensions of the Caribbean. The former included English, Danish, French, Dutch Caribbean, and the latter is comprised of the Antilles, Gran Caribe, and Caribbean basin.

I was thankful when she came to the conclusion, summarizing the definition of the Caribbean as, first, a social construction; second, the definitions have been made by the indigenous and new settlers; third, there are numerous definitions; fourth, the definitions have two fundamental axes, one, maritime geography and, two, cultural. The cultural axis is increasingly more important, both in its tangible and intangible aspects. There was one set of points she wanted to stress about the importance of the definitions of the Caribbean: first, they reflect and corroborate the fundamental characteristics of the area; second, they show that the people are conscious of the dimensions and existence of our area; third, and the most important is the point that the definitions help to reinforce the national and regional identities of the inhabitants of the countries and region of the Caribbean. This, she stressed, perhaps sensing my bewilderment at the inordinate amount of time we had taken on this rather arcane subject, was not simply an academic exercise, but an exercise of great national and regional importance.

I perked up when we got to the subject of the history of the Caribbean as border empires, or what I would translate as the imperial frontiers of Caribbean history.

Predictably, she began with the original inhabitants of the region, the Arawaks, Caribs and Tainos who probably came from the Mexican and South American region. They survived in some Caribbean countries such as Guyana where she had the privilege of seeing them in their natural state when she visited the country. Even where they apparently disappeared, their cultural and biological traces remain, even here in Cuba where some black people from Santiago and Guantanamo seem to bear traces of Indian ancestry.

Before proceeding, she offered a quote from Robert Fernandez Retamar, director of Casa de Les Americas and one of the most important intellectuals in Cuba, to provide a frame for her argument and analysis:

In 1492 when the Europeans arrived in the Caribbean the two most densely populated cities in the world were Tenochtitlan and Peking; as far as I know those cities were not in Europe. To claim to name the region, to discover it by a group of Europeans for a continent that had millions of people was an aberration. In reality, this arrival behooves us to recover the real history of the region.

And Professor Castaneda sneered emphatically; they didn't discover anything at all.

But what was the significance of the arrival of the Europeans? She underscored five points. First, it represented a concrete expression of modernity and its representation initiated our modernity, a modernity that was distinct from European modernity for it was marked by colonialism and all its consequences. Second, it inaugurated colonialism in the Americas. Third, it initiated capitalism as a world economic system. Fourth, what the French historian Fernand Braudel called *mondialization* acquired new dimensions. Finally, for the Caribbean, the European arrival led to the fragmentation of the Caribbean and its conversion into an imperial frontier.

She was now on a roll. She illustrated the rest of the lecture with a dazzling array of maps. If this elderly professor could do this for her lectures, surely I can do the same. I

resolved finally to enter the age of PowerPoint and other instructional technologies for my lectures, which I have resisted until now.

The fragmentation of the Caribbean was manifested in two ways: first, in the division of the region into different, smaller territories in terms of governance; and second, in the internal affairs of each society which was simultaneously fragmented into social classes and ethnic groups with their respective cultural manifestations. Why should it be regarded as border empire, or an imperial frontier? She emphasized two points as well. First, the powerful European countries moved their borders beyond their Atlantic coastal lines. Second, they tried to import all manifestations of their respective cultures: history, religion, customs, dance, music, architecture, culinary arts, plastic arts, etc. They tried, but they couldn't, she stated gleefully. Instead of European culture developing in the Caribbean, transculturalization took place, cultural *mélange* developed, and new Caribbean cultures emerged. She offered several illustrations.

She began by observing that the Cuban revolutionary government was clever in its cultural policies. It recognized what was a reality that had been denied for a long time. African music, dance, and religion used to be either outrightly forbidden or despised, but the government recognized them and encouraged them to develop as an integral part of Cuban culture. Several cultural institutions were founded, including the National Folklore Company of Cuba. Most of its members are black and they will be representing Cuba at the upcoming Beijing Olympics. Rita intervened to note that they were selected by the Chinese. Blacks were still underrepresented on television but the government and everyone was working hard to change that. The history of cultural discrimination has survived for 500 years, which is difficult to overturn completely in 50 years of the revolution. She noted that the Haitian community in Cuba has been able to maintain its identity and make significant contributions. One dance forum, for example, called *La Tumba Francesa*, was recently declared by UNESCO as a living world cultural heritage.

Returning to the past, she maintained that African cultural forms retained their dominance in the Caribbean. This was not simply because of the African demographic weight, but their cultural weight. African music pervades all aspects of Caribbean music. Even in architecture, African influences are evident. After all, the Africans built the castles and buildings of the new colonies. They incorporated their own point of view in the shapes and colors of buildings and faces of the sculptures they constructed for the buildings. Altogether, 10–15 million Africans were brought to the Americas from diverse African groups, so that there was transculturalization among the Africans themselves.

The European colonizers achieved the fragmentation of the Caribbean in both territorial and social terms. They of course disbanded the native economy and initiated a new history of the Caribbean according to their interests. The process of colonization started with the Spanish. They were the only colonizers of the region until the third part of the seventeenth century. Thus, they enjoyed total hegemony until then when other European powers arrived and began to compete with them. The rivalries among the European powers took various forms beginning with corsairs and pirates who attacked Spanish ships. Then some of the European powers seized coastal territories as colonies or settled in certain parts of Spanish colonies, and finally some took the colonies for themselves. Virtually all Caribbean territories had multiple colonial powers or experienced rivalries among the European powers. For example, Haiti was originally a Spanish colony until 1697 when Spain signed a treaty ceding the western part of the island of Hispaniola to France. French buccaneers — so-called because they sold smoked meat — had begun their

encroachment in Hispaniola (the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic) from an island off the coast.

I thought we were beginning to get somewhere. She summarized the lecture and outlined the topics for our next lecture. I can't wait for her analysis of Cuban history in general and Afro-Cuban history in particular. She clearly loves teaching and in me, she has found an eager pupil.

For the rest of the afternoon I was back at the National Hotel to check e-mail, to which there was a considerable amount to respond to. I also checked my account and saw the research funds had been deposited. I can't wait to get the money to Paul wired tomorrow so that I can do the research properly assured that I will be able to pay Rita and to eat dinners that are more decent. I have been scavenging fast food in the La Rampa cafeteria and coffee shop next to the hotel—all fewer than 10 pesos a meal. The buffets are now out of my reach, what a bummer!

I stayed at the National Hotel, longer than I had planned, until it stopped raining. I was safely back in my hotel when the afternoon's tropical thunderstorm resumed. The dark skies rumbled with lightening that felt like bombs exploding. But it was quickly over.

I resumed reading Caryl Phillip's new book, *Foreigners: Three English Lives* and could hardly put it down. I met Caryl when I interviewed at Barnard in 2001 and he would have been my colleague had I accepted the offer to direct the Pan-African Program there. I started reading the book yesterday. It is a painfully sad account of three black men alienated, abused, and finally abandoned by England, each told in moving detail, each a true story appropriately embellished with the larger truth of a fine novelist's retelling. The first, Francis Barber, a servant of Samuel Johnson, died an impoverished pauper in an infirmary; the second, Randolph Turpin, once a world champion boxer, Britain's first black boxer to reach such heights, ended his indebted and desperate life with his own hands; and the last, David Oluwale, a Nigerian stowaway who came to Britain at age 18 in search of education, ended up a vagabond harassed by the police who eventually murdered him. The three men live and die tragically notwithstanding brief moments of the normalcy of ordinariness and, in the case of Turpin, even glory as a boxing champion; Barber, the temporary glow of Johnson's fame; and Oluwale, his love of dancing. Another damning indictment of the despicable inhumanity of Englishness and empire steeped in anti-black racism.

July 29, 1998

We went back to meet the artist, Salvador Gonzalez at his establishment at Callejón de Hamel, which also serves as a community cultural center. The block of buildings on this narrow lane are some three stories high and are adorned with his murals, all bright, beautiful colors and shapes evoking the Orishas of Yoruba religion. He was sitting in the shade painting and we were warmly welcomed. His assistant, a chubby, light-skinned man wearing an afro partly patted down by a bandana invited us into the gallery where he gave brief remarks about Salvador's paintings.

The assistant, whose name I missed, explained that Salvador had been painting from youth. He moved into this neighborhood in 1990. As we came in, Rita had pointed out a window to a small apartment where Salvador lived before acquiring his large bungalow, outside of which he was sitting. He built the entire establishment by himself without assistance from even the government, explained Rita, who had once worked with him

on a project. The assistant emphasized, in case I had missed it, that Salvador was an important muralist. He was keen to represent African religions—Santería, Arara, Abakwa, all from West Africa, and Regla Palmonto from the Congo. His art drew inspiration and used the representations and colors and symbols of these religions and combined African, surrealist, and cubist styles. His very motivation was to connect Cuban identity to its African roots. For long in Cuban history and society African identity and culture were despised, and Salvador has been one of the major artists who have worked to change that. His work is now widely known throughout Cuba and even internationally. He painted the mural in the House of Africa and he is frequently interviewed on Cuban television. He has trained many artists, some who are now in Canada and Switzerland. He runs workshops for children on Cuban culture, art, and history and its African roots.

I asked the assistant, who spoke fluent English, whether African visitors and artists came here often and what their impressions were. He recalled only a few, perhaps two or three, who didn't agree with Salvador's representations of Africa. The assistant put it to the fact that they were Muslim or Christian and therefore unsympathetic to representations of traditional African religions. Ironically, it would seem that Cuba embodies the old Africa, the cultural energy and soul of ancestral Africa more vibrantly than many parts of contemporary Africa itself.

As he talked, I admired the paintings with their bold colors, lines, and forms, in which the human shapes, the nose, the mouths were stylized to evoke different Orishas. Salvador used religion such as Santería, explained the assistant, as a means of promoting the interaction between human beings, Orishas, and nature. He took me outside and showed me the sculptures including some hanging on rods across the lane. One was of a figure of a man representing white believers of African religions, whose conversation started when secrets of Abakwa, the secret Calabari society, were revealed to a white person. The symbols on the murals inspired by ideograms of the Orishas are meant to invoke energy from nature. At the entrance, which we had not seen properly last Sunday because it was crowded, is built like a temple with stones; the spirit of the Orishas are embodied in stones. On both sides of the entrance were represented Orishas to protect children and the compound. One was Shango. Near the entrance was a small shop selling herbs for both physical and spiritual cleansing, *limpesa*, he called it.

All along, Rita was sitting and talking to Salvador. I joined them and thanked Salvador for sparing time for me. Before I could ask him any questions, he said, with Rita translating, he had a question for me. It was about Obama. He wanted to know more about his background. I gave the highlights from his book, *Dreams from My Father*, and my own interpretations of his appeal. He is clearly taken by Obama. His assistant had earlier given me a copy of the painting and note Salvador had sent to Obama in March this year. The painting represents three masks of three fighters, whose spirit, he said with a serious chuckle, Obama needs to succeed. Obama is a reflection of the deepest aspirations of black people, of the grassroots. I wasn't too sure about the latter point but I didn't want to argue with him.

He recounted his experiences with African Americans on two visits to the U.S., which surprised him. The first was in 1994 when he attended a conference in Harlem, New York, at Hunter College. He couldn't understand why those he met refused to have anything to do with Africa. We are Americans, they said, Africa is irrelevant to us; why does he defend Africa when he is so light in his complexion, they wondered. He defended his love for Africa, for blacks, because of his own heritage. He explained to them the need to

honor their ancestors during slavery who had suffered so much and all those who struggled for freedom, from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. Du Bois and many others. He reminded them that the singers who began gospel music and other forms of black music were expressing deep spiritual consciousness even as they were denied the use of drums.

He concluded from this trip that the spirit of Africa will be revived and re-vindicated first in the Caribbean before it fully takes hold in the United States. The second experience was in 2004 when he was invited to paint a mural in a black neighborhood in Philadelphia. It was a tough neighborhood. They wanted to know what he intended to paint. When he expressed his interest in painting a historical figure such as Douglass or an important African musical instrument like the drum, they objected, preferring, they said, that he painted something more contemporary and happy. In the end, he painted a big drum and a flower and called the mural, "Flower to Africa." During the same trip, he had an opportunity to meet a black man who had come from Africa to New York in 1940 and was the first to play drums in the city.

When I commented on the power of the performance, I had witnessed last Sunday, he paused and said almost in a reverential whisper, this neighborhood is where the first cemetery in Havana was established; there are many blacks buried in this area; their spirits are with us. Going back to Obama, which he did every so often, he noted that like him, it was his color that made it easier for Obama to run for the presidency and that made it possible for Salvador to set up this establishment. If both of them were too dark, they would not have had such opportunities. Their lighter skin color allowed them to enter and get ready acceptance by white society without being rejected by black society. Salvador is of mixed race, with a white father and a black mother. His almost obsessive identification with Obama suddenly became clearer.

I wanted him to talk more about the development of Cuban art in general, Afro-Cuban art in particular, and place himself in these traditions. We didn't go as far as I wished. Nevertheless, he explained that conditions in Cuba, and by extension in Latin America, for blacks were different compared to the Anglo-Saxon world up north in the U.S. While slavery was harsh everywhere, the racial brutalities of groups like the Ku Klux Klan in the United States after slavery were absent in Cuba. Most importantly, blacks in Cuba were allowed to maintain their rituals, religions, drums, you name it, so that they were able to pass cultural traditions from one generation to the next. This doesn't mean, of course, there was no discrimination between whites and blacks, and among the latter between mulattoes and non-mulattoes, each group having its own societies. It is indeed impossible to forget the race factor in Cuban society. He recalls when his own parents were married and went for their honeymoon in Santa Clara they were widely abused, called all sorts of names. And when he started his work as a painter, he was frequently asked why he wasted his time painting about blacks, about African religions. The questions of course assumed that anything to do with blacks was pejorative. It was for this reason, Rita explained after we had left, that Salvador never joined the official national artists' association, which initially dismissed his work as religiously inspired and not true art.

The point is that African traditions survived and continued and the various African groups cleverly integrated their own traditions with Spanish traditions, in the process of which they created uniquely Cuban traditions. For his own work, Salvador continues to promote black culture, not as special, but deserving its own respect. All cultures, including artists, have taken something from Africa—surrealists, cubists, structuralists, action painters. Many modern artistic traditions are rooted in ancient African cultures. This is

even true of body paintings and decorations, he said. There is no richer continent, culturally, than Africa, even if it is materially poor. In this millennium, it is our responsibility to give back to Africa what the continent has given to the world. Africa is where the defense of black people in the world will have to be now. It is for this reason that he regards Obama's candidacy as critical, for it unites Africa and the diaspora. Obama is the spear for Africa. His victory will have repercussions for Africa and for the Americas; perhaps it will be possible to help a country such as Haiti to be helped to free itself from poverty and mass suffering. The battle for the defense of blacks in the world is a very intellectual, very serious battle we all have to be dedicated to.

He concluded that his project as an artist is self-financed and, at heart, it is spiritual. It is for that reason that he gets respect in Cuba and around the world. I would have loved to ask more questions but Rita felt we had already taken up too much of his time. But before we left, Salvador invited us into his house. Full of art, it is a work of art itself from the colored tiles, to the painted walls, to the furniture, to the sculpture and religious objects. The walls are an art gallery. The living room is covered with the most huge, wall-to-wall, stunningly beautiful and powerful paintings I have ever seen in anybody's house. My eyes popped out and my mouth gasped in total wonder. He grinned with utter self-satisfaction.

His one big wish is to visit Africa one day. I wondered whether it would not be a good idea to introduce him to Nkiru Nzegwu, Chika Okeke, and Salah Hasan who might facilitate such a wish if there was an art exhibition or conference somewhere on the continent such as the renowned but misnamed, 3rd Congress of Negro Arts, planned by President Wade who mistakes himself for an intellectual and patron of the arts like Leopold Senghor.

We walked from Salvador's establishment to the bank to check if my money had finally arrived. As we walked, the buildings suddenly looked familiar, like the architecture in Paris of course, but this was no Paris in its dilapidated squalor.

The money had indeed arrived. I rushed to the hotel to get my passport for identification. When I returned Rita explained what the bank teller told her, the Canadian bank had converted the money into euros, which the Cuban bank would convert into pesos. Because of these conversions and charges, I would lose more than \$300 out of the \$2,000 that had been sent; the Cuban bank was charging only 6 pesos. I cursed the embargo and the Canadian bank. This was one more confirmation of how costly the embargo is and how exploitative banks are. But I was relieved that I could now pay Rita for her research assistance and eat a little better, which I did. For dinner, I went to the hotel restaurant for the buffet.

For the rest of the afternoon I went to the National Hotel and buried myself in a new novel, *On Beauty*, by Zadie Smith, set in a university town on the love and foibles of academics and their families. A perfect, gripping read for a lifelong academic who aspires to write a novel about academics one day. I would have loved to go out for a long walk, or perhaps even to a club, but between the novel and the rains, my hotel room seemed cozy.

July 30, 2008

It was back to Professor Castaneda's lectures. Rita did not turn up today. The professor talked about Caribbean society from the arrival of Europeans to the Haitian Revolution

of 1804. A part of me is amused by these lectures. She has a presumption, for I didn't indicate I wanted to be lectured on Caribbean history, that I know little about the region. For goodness sake, I taught in Jamaica and have been studying and teaching African and world histories, including Caribbean history, for years! What I really wanted from her were interpretations of Cuban history, to give me insights into debates among Cuban scholars on Cuban historiography. My dissatisfaction rose when she indicated at the end that she expected to be paid 100 pesos for each lecture. Of course, I will pay out of courtesy, but I hadn't asked for formal lectures to begin with and in all my travels, I have not paid any of the people I interviewed. Talk of capitalist vice in a socialist republic!

According to the esteemed professor, there are three principal elements of Caribbean history: plantation, migration, and modern slavery. Five major developments took place during the first few centuries of Caribbean history. First, the fragmentation of the region was consolidated. Second, the plantation was adopted as the mainstay of the colonial system. Third, forced migration became the dominant feature of movement in the Caribbean. There were different types of migrations, of Amerindians, European indentured workers, and Africans who became, in the Caribbean, black slaves. The fourth characteristic is that African slavery became the dominant form of labor. Finally, the collapse of the colonial system began in the course of this period.

The plantation economy prevailed all over the Caribbean. The social relations created by the plantation system paralleled, structured, and guided all social relations, both class and ethnic. The plantation system combined two key elements, the dynamics of European slavery and modern capitalism—the slaves were used as labor to produce merchandise for the capitalist market. Slavery had differences and similarities and manifested itself asynchronously. The key similarity of course is that all slaves were brought to provide labor. But they arrived in different countries and at different moments so that production relations varied. In the English Caribbean, for example, the slave masters, for the most part, lived in England and were an absentee plutocracy, while the Spanish and French lived in the Caribbean. Asynchronously, because slavery started and was abolished at different moments. The plantation system generated ethnocentric societies in which whites were on top and blacks at the bottom. This ideological structure developed even in areas where there were no plantations. In other words, racism became a powerful transnational ideology that has survived to this day. She remarked, quite ruefully, that when her students first meet her they initially see a black woman and assume she is stupid. As a black person you are forced to demonstrate that you are not stupid every day, you have to claim your position as a normal, intelligent human being all the time.

She prefaced her discussion of slavery with two quotes. One from a historian whose name I forgot to note, who wrote: "In the Caribbean, slavery was something more than one institution with different laws, customs, policies; this was a really totalitarian system of economic, political, social, and sexual exploitation based on force, violence and the ideology of racism. Slavery required stripping the slaves of their past, their culture and destroying all their freedoms and inflicting on them social death." The second quote was from Hilliard d'Auberteuil, uttered in 1776, which indicates the slave masters were fully aware of what they were doing, "In Santo Domingo the interests and security of society demanded that the black race be regarded as so desperate and inferior and let that indelible mark last forever."

Slavery was caused by the need for abundant and cheap labor. Its ideological justification rested on the assumed racial and cultural inferiority of its victims. The consequence of

this was the rise of pervasive biological and cultural racism. It all meant that the conditions of life and work were brutal. Slavery was characterized by rigid relations of production, cruelty, abuses, separation of the family, and very terrible punishments. The slaves of course resisted. Slave resistance included indolence, suicide, xenophobia, self-mutilation, temporary flight, and maroonage. Maroonage was not only physical but cultural, the infliction, the imposition of African foods, customs, styles, on the masters. She gave an interesting anecdote on hairstyles in which slave women in eighteenth-century Cuba braided their masters' children's hair in African hairstyles. The maroons were found in the cities, the countryside and on the sea—the sailors. The brutality of slavery was meted out equally to men and women. She insisted that women participated actively in all forms of anti-slavery resistance. She conceded that sexual abuse, as I suggested, brought an added gendered inflection to the violence of the slave system.

The slave trade in the Caribbean brought 11–15 million people. I wasn't sure whether she was referring to the Americas in general. For one slave that arrived, six or seven died, she maintained. The slave trade evolved from capture to a highly organized system. Africa lost a sizeable portion of its population, and given the age and productivity of the enslaved population—they were young—it was left with a deficit that was difficult to compensate. Africa's demographic losses translated into a huge loss on development. The slaves were used as a labor force principally in agriculture, domestic work, and services. But they were also used as merchandise and objects of different commercial transactions including insurance to guarantee loans for slave owners and even colonial governments. The slaves, in short, created material and cultural wealth.

She concluded by elaborating on the ideological justifications and conditions of life and work. African ethnic inferiority, which was universally assumed among the slaves, implied the slaves' cultural inferiority, which in turn was assumed evident in the color of their skin. For this reason, in the Caribbean and in the Americas the descendants of the former slaves maintain in the color of their skin the mark of their original servility. As René Depestre said, slaves were utilized as a biological combustible (used like fuel). They were mostly useful for seven years before they became disposable. On the sugar plantations at the height of the production season, slaves worked 22 hours a day, nutrition was limited, sanitary conditions were bad, families were separated, and cruel punishment was meted out. She showed gruesome pictures illustrating the horrible conditions under which slaves lived and worked.

As politely as I could, I suggested that I would like to know more about her views on Afro-Cuban history and historiography. Her face registered some irritation. She had planned to talk about the Haitian Revolution. Well, I was in Haiti last year and have read about the Haitian Revolution! I will need to bring this up with Rita who might be in a better position to redirect the professor without hurting her feelings. We were about to part when Rita called to ask if we could meet at the hotel at 1:30 p.m. for her to take me to my next appointment.

We took a taxi to Marianao in west Central Havana to visit the Caribbean Association of Cuba. It is a black working-class neighborhood. It used to be the largest municipality in Havana. It was later divided into four—Marianao, La Lisa, Playa, and Miramar. Playa and Miramar are, or used to be, upper and middle-class neighborhoods. When we drove through there on our way back you could see the difference: the houses were large, some could even be called mansions, and there were more trees and green lawns. Closer to the hotel there were rows of high-rise apartment blocks and shops quite different from Central and Old Havana. Like all major cities, Havana has many faces, indeed, spatialized hierarchies and enclaves of race and class.

The Caribbean Association building houses several offices and multipurpose halls. We were met by one of the officials who left us in the main office to get the president. In the meantime, we were joined by an active member of the association, Hector Anderson, a musician and a man of Jamaican descent. Tall and slim, he has a face of a comedian with a permanent smile that exposes bad, broken teeth. He began singing at age five in church and at weddings. He joined a band called *Big Boys* where he played for 17 years before joining the army where he spent four years. Then he joined a jazz band, *Sabor Ritino*, where he spent eight years. In 1976, he went to Santiago de Cuba. In 1984, he started a new group, *Adelberto and Sons*, which he left 11 years later to start his own group, *Anderson and Sons*, which survived for five years. In 2007, he joined a new group, *Casa Company Segundo*. He has visited several countries around the world, including in the Americas, the United States, Venezuela, Santo Domingo, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Switzerland, Germany (both former East and West), France, Austria, Norway, Holland, Finland, and Sweden. Unfortunately, he has not been to Africa due to lack of sponsorship.

A sponsor once sought to organize a trip to Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, it was only for four members of his then 10-member band, which made little sense, for the band works as a team. He talked about his career with little prompting and with infectious enthusiasm. As a result of his band's multiple trips abroad, he boasted, people had come to appreciate what true Cuban music was all about—its complex rhythms, its uniqueness, that it is not some adulterated salsa sound. He discussed with impressive knowledge the various forms of Cuban music—son, cha cha, rumba, danzón, timba—but insisted that Cuban rhythm is one. I tried to get his take on the development of Cuban music over time. He was simply dismissive of young musicians who he disparaged for their propensity for polyrhythmic mixtures that messed up the rhythm of Cuban music. He was a little more forthcoming on the cross-fertilization of music across the Caribbean community; for example, on the impact of Haitian music in the Dominican Republic's merengue. Anderson spoke good English. His Jamaican-born parents insisted that they speak English at home and he said he did the same with his own children. He felt he was a Cuban of Jamaican descent so it was important to know both Spanish and English. Recently, he visited Jamaica to attend a Jamaican diaspora conference. He went to his parents' place of origin and he wept when he saw it. It was a great conference, he said, and he performed with Harry Belafonte.

Anderson was telling us about his visit to Jamaica when the president and the man who had met us came in. We were served cold drinks. I turned down a beer telling the man, to his surprise, that I don't drink alcohol. Ms. Maria Hernandez, the president, is a middle aged woman of Barbadian descent, but speaks no English. Anderson took it upon himself to provide translation, leaving Rita to provide occasional clarifications. She began by saying she was happy that I had come to visit the association. The association will be 80 years old in 2012. It was formed to unite Caribbean people in Cuba, to enable them to work together as brothers and sisters, to help them retain and share their cultures. The association has 23 members coming from Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, and the Dominican Republic. They have branches around the country. The majority of Caribbean descendants are in the east and south of the island. In Guantanamo there is a large center, like the one in Havana. Anderson intervened with a little history, saying a lot of Jamaicans and Barbadians who had worked to build the Panama Canal were brought by the United Fruit Company to a place called Bawes, from where some moved to Guantanamo to work at the naval base and spread elsewhere around the country. Jamaican descendants number at least 500,000, he said. His grandmother came in 1922.

Hernandez resumed with a wry smile at the intervention. The association enjoys good relations with the embassies of Caribbean countries and invites African embassies to their major events. They organize celebrations of national independence days and receive delegations from Caribbean countries. In 2006, for example, they hosted a trade union from Barbados that established an educational and solidarity project with their Caribbean counterparts. In the same year, they organized a trip of Barbadian descendants to Barbados. And recently the Prime Minister of Jamaica visited and invited members of the association to attend the diaspora conference in Jamaica. Five were selected, and a beaming Anderson indicated he was one of the five. The Prime Minister promised to maintain and facilitate links and open new connections with the diaspora in Cuba.

The association has been making steady progress. It started with 6,000 pesos when the building was being constructed. Finances remain their most pressing problem. It was partly in order to improve the association's finances that Anderson started organizing musical events to raise funds. He plays music for free or brings other singers, and the proceeds go to the association. The association also sponsors a television program on channel 2 every Friday at 8:30 p.m. For each program, the culture of a particular Caribbean country is showcased. In fact, the association designates particular days in the week or weeks in the year for particular member countries. The hall serves as a space for community activities and even weddings. They would like to improve links to Africa. They hosted a delegation from Conakry, Guinea, but a lot more could be done. As far as they are concerned, the president concluded, the Caribbean Association serves as an African association as well.

The man who had brought the president asked to speak. Rita had introduced me and my project as the president addressed us, and the man referred directly to the project. He suggested that my project should focus on religion and culture because culture is very important. The Caribbean's contribution to African culture lay in the fact that, out of many African cultures brought by the enslaved Africans, was created one culture. It is important that blacks write their own history, which has been distorted by whites who have dominated in the writing of our history. It is impossible for whites to provide an accurate history, to do that one has to be inside the history. So he was pleased to know that I was working on this project. He revealed that he had once been in the Cuban embassy in the former Zaire in 1983. Before leaving, Anderson invited me to attend Jamaica's 46th independence celebrations next Friday at 8:00 p.m. As if determined to have the last word, the president pulled out a wad of pictures showing various prominent visitors, including the Prime Minister of Jamaica. I was reminded earlier this morning when the attendant at Professor Digna's office showed me an album of her Jamaican father and her siblings scattered in Jamaica, London, and New York diasporas within the diaspora, the overlapping sojourns of the sons and daughters of the continent in the diaspora.

Besides checking e-mail when I returned to the hotel, I buried myself in Smith's novel *On Beauty*, which I finished reading. Quite an entertaining read, if not particularly profound. The two main male characters turn out to be sexual predators of young women in a campus culture that is a snake-pit of hypocrisies. I don't think the author quite succeeds in giving convincing portraits of the Kipps family members compared to the Belseys. Professor Kipps, the black conservative is a sad caricature, his oversexed daughter, Victoria, remains an impenetrable plastic figure. Even Kiki, the black wife of the fully drawn Howard, a white English professor, is inexplicably loyal to the philandering Howard

until the very end of the book. Zadie Smith seems to be trying so hard to write an American novel, it shows. That's a pity, for she is a hugely talented writer.

July 31, 2008

Rita came half an hour late, panting and out of breath. She gave a long explanation that she was delayed in a meeting with an American solidarity group that arrived last night and whose itinerary she was busy trying to finalize. I reassured her that it was no big deal.

We took a taxi to Old Havana for the visit to Africa House. Before getting to the museum, we stopped by the Arab House when Rita saw the former director of African studies at her institute who was standing talking to someone at the entrance. I was introduced to the retired director, a short, bald-headed man with a moustache who looked like an Ethiopian. The building was under renovation, so nothing was open except a dingy office on the second floor where we were offered coffee, which I declined as Rita and the former director made a phone call. On the third floor is the only mosque in Havana which, we were told, is attended by diplomats and students from Muslim countries.

Part of Africa House was also under renovation. The museum was opened 23 years ago, we were told by a guide who took us around the portion of the museum that was open. A small mulatto woman, she had worked at the museum since its opening and she was very knowledgeable about African arts and cultures. Hardly had she started the tour when the former African studies director found us and proudly showed me, on a map perched across the wall along the stairs to the second floor, the various cities he had visited over many years and trips across Africa. He had been all over the continent, from southern to eastern to northern to western Africa. I suggested to him and Rita that I would love to interview him.

The museum guide resumed showing us around beginning with the ground floor, which displays contemporary African art as well as objects from slavery. The museum was opened by the black commander of the armed forces on January 6, 1986. Altogether, the museum holds 5,000 pieces representing African and Afro-Cuban art and history. Many are donations given to Castro on his African trips and others are from African leaders and other visitors to Cuba. The kings of Ashanti, Yoruba, Lesotho and Swaziland have visited the museum, so have numerous African presidents. Many of the pieces displayed on the ground floor consist of sculptures, including religious sculptures from West Africa. In the middle stands a large wooden sculpture by a Nigerian artist of a pregnant woman, her hands clasped around her chin, her eyes closed as if deep in prayer. The slave objects include large iron pots that were used to cook for the slaves.

The second floor displays musical instruments from around Africa and Afro-Cuba. This is the most recent addition to the museum. While the first floor has a theatre where community activities are organized by the museum, the second floor has a conference room that can seat up to three dozen people. In the conference room were displayed Afro-Mexican paintings by the painter and anthropologist, Ricardo Infante. The musical instruments include string instruments, drums, and variations of the *mbira*. In a few instances, the Afro-Cuban instruments are juxtaposed to the African instruments providing an immediate comparative examination of Afro-Cuban musical innovations. In one corner

of the room are the various collections of Fernando Ortiz, the renowned anthropologist, including original furniture from his office.

The third floor is dedicated to wood and stone sculpture from southern Africa. The museum organizes student activities under its "Walking with the Family" program that occasionally brings teachers and artists from Africa. The collection I saw was decent and I can only imagine what the fuller collection looks like when the entire museum is open. But the museum has the typical format of such museums in the western world. First, it focuses almost exclusively on sub-Saharan Africa. Second, there is the tendency to attribute artistic objects to entire ethnic groups or even countries without the names of the individual artists. Third, paintings and contemporary African art are largely missing, while sculpture predominates.

Efforts to have a conversation about the contents and popularity of the museum did not seem to go too far, for Rita didn't seem to interpret my questions correctly or the guide misunderstood her, for she talked about other museums in the area and noted that the museums of the revolution and the national museum of art were among the most popular. The director of the museum, Dr. Jesus Guanche Perez, to whom I had been introduced earlier, brought us packets of information on the museum. We exchanged cards. I was also introduced to other museum officials, all of whom were quite friendly and appeared mulatto or white. Black Cubans seem to be conspicuously absent in the heritage and tourism industries.

Rita wished me good luck for the next three days, as we are not scheduled to meet. She has suggested a number of cultural events that I might want to attend. We will reconnect on Sunday or Monday. She is extremely busy organizing visits by North American academics like me. She has suggested that I seem to be a lot easier to get along with, perhaps because I am not an American who tends to be demanding. I could not tell whether she was genuine or simply flattering me. When I returned to the hotel, I thought it was time to be a little more demanding. I wrote her an e-mail repeating what I had suggested to her, that for the final lecture with Prof. Castaneda, she should discuss Afro-Cuban history since 1902 and following the Cuban Revolution rather than the Haitian Revolution, which I already knew about; after all, I had spent three weeks in Haiti last summer.

Apart from e-mailing, I didn't seem to be particularly keen to start reading another novel. I had taken out Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, none of which seemed to catch my mood. So I decided to take a break, walk around the neighborhood of the hotel, sample the night, and take a late dinner at the café adjacent to the hotel. The streets were busy very late into the night, mostly with young people and incredibly beautiful young women looking to make a quick buck with some lonely or lascivious tourist. Every morning at breakfast, you see these white men, some fairly old, with their skimpily dressed mulatto and black young women smiling with fake laughter and interest in them. Officially, women of the night are not supposed to be permitted in the hotel. The scenes at breakfast put the lie to this. Sex tourism seems to be alive and well in the socialist republic.

August 1, 2008

After breakfast, I took a taxi to go to the venue of the three-day 6th Festival Kiba Kreyol, where I got a big surprise. The festival was held at the Casa de la Cultura del la Habana

Vieja located at Revillagigedo between Gloria and Mission in a very poor neighborhood. The hall where the festival was held looked relatively new, clean, and well-maintained. It was half full and the conference had not yet started, as I had feared.

When Hilario Batista Felix saw me, he rushed towards me, hand of welcome stretched out. He led me to a place to sit and introduced me to several people including a tall Haitian man, Serge Bellegarde, who I later found out lives in Washington, D.C., and has lived in the U.S. for 38 years. That's when I met Sari Jean-Francois. She was sitting next to two Haitian women, a mother and a daughter, who were hosting her, as I soon found out. Wearing braids, she looked younger than her 31 years. At first, I thought she was Cuban, but her English sounded too good for a local. She is a Canadian from Toronto. She went to school at the University of Toronto where she was taught by my old friend, Dickson Eyoh. The first black Canadian I had met in all my research travels thus far. And she was pleasant, indeed charming, to boot! She was born in Ottawa of St. Lucian parents and we immediately hit it off—two English-speaking black Canadians desperate for normal conversation. I told her my daughter was also born in Ottawa. I teased her that I came to Canada before she was born in 1978, to do my PhD. That's when she revealed she was born in 1977.

We desperately clung to each other's company for the rest of the day. It didn't help that the proceedings were in Spanish and Kreyol, which neither of us understood. Well, Sari has become increasingly interested in Kreyol and she found out about the conference on the Internet, but she is more familiar with St. Lucian Kreyol than Haitian Kreyol. She is scheduled to make a presentation on Sunday. She fretted about staying at a resort, an hour from Havana. Her colleagues, with their liberal consciences or pretensions, wouldn't approve, she said. I told her I made no apologies about staying in nice places; such places should not be the monopoly of white folks if we can also afford them. She is currently working at two jobs, one as a social worker. She once worked in Chicago with a development company, which she quit after a year when she lost interest in the machinations of the housing gentrification industry. She has a master's in planning; she has just finished a master's in social work. She has traveled to Africa only once, to Cameroon, and elsewhere to a couple of Caribbean islands including St. Lucia and Martinique, and she has been to southern Brazil, where she was struck by its whiteness and extreme black poverty.

Hilario opened the conference with his presidential speech. This was followed by other speeches. I didn't get a thing out of it, which was very frustrating, for I suspect they were talking about important issues. It was the same with the afternoon session about Cuban activists arrested in the U.S. A man Sari had met later explained to her, and she summarized to me, that the five Cuban detainees had been double-agents working for Cuban intelligence in the CIA and they revealed a plot to kill Castro in Panama. Apparently everybody in Cuba knows about this, which has become a *cause célèbre*. It was the first time I had heard about it. One of the detained Cuban's brothers was part of the panel.

In between the morning and afternoon sessions was a cultural gala, for which no translation was necessary. That's the beauty of music and dance. They can be enjoyed without language skills. Two groups performed. The first was a group of four or five young women, led by Hilario's daughter, as I later discovered. They began with an exquisite candle-lit musical performance, wearing flowing yellow outfits. Except for Hilario's daughter, the other singers were mulatto. Their vocal music, sometimes accompanied by one of the women playing a guitar or a drum, had sweet melodies made all the more enchanting by the gentle swaying movements of the singers, who, after the opening act, changed into white pants and blouses and blue shawls. The next group could not have

been more different, save for the white dresses and skirts for the women and white pants and T-shirts for the men. The five pairs of men and women dancers were accompanied by five musicians, a lead vocalist, three drummers, and another vocalist who also played an iron bar. The music was explosive and the dancing had a thunderous physicality combined with well-synchronized and highly charged flirtatious movements among the paired male and female dancers, for whom the audience shook, stared, smiled, laughed, and clapped in awe. It was simply amazing.

Sari and I took a taxi to the Plaza de la Revolución. When we got there, we realized it was a mistake—I had meant to show her the Museum of the Revolution and other nearby museums. It was already 5:00 p.m. and the museums were closed, so the taxi driver told us, and he dropped us at my hotel. After a short rest—it felt strange having somebody to talk to in substantial English after all these days in the hotel—I walked her to where she was staying, which turned out to be about 20 minutes from the hotel and not far from the Malecón. Hilario had managed to rent her a room in somebody's house for the duration of the festival, after which she returns to her resort and departs from there back to Canada. From the outside, the neighborhood looked run down, but I was surprised, walking into the tiny apartment where Sari was staying, to find that it looked sturdy and well-maintained. In fact, the four flights of stairs were made of real marble. The owner of the apartment, who I had seen earlier in the day at the festival, was slumped in her chair watching television and she greeted me cordially. But that was as far as our conversation could go despite making several futile attempts. Other than the television hanging near the door to the balcony, the walls were covered with three or so wedding and family photos. In the kitchen, a pressure cooker of rice was on. I wondered how there could be a room to rent in such a tiny place.

After Sari finished freshening up, we left for the carnival that started today. As we walked out of the neighborhood toward the Malecón, Sari remarked on the incredible number of children in the streets. She is clearly sympathetic to Cuba's efforts to provide free social services to its people. And we remarked on the festive crowds, the apparent safety. We were both hungry, so before joining the carnival we tried to find a place to eat. The bars and eateries along the Malecón, which were quite crowded, didn't seem to have much to offer in terms of food so we ended up walking back to my hotel to the adjacent cafeteria and coffee shop where I have eaten on so many lonely evenings. We sat there forever talking about all manner of subjects from the political to the personal. It was as if we had known each other a long time. Such can be the strange intimacies of foreign travel. While walking her back to her place we came across the tail end of one of the carnival floats. As I walked back, I realized this was the first day since I came to Cuba that I actually had some normal fun, thanks to the ability to talk to another human being without linguistic and cultural translation.

August 2, 2008

A rather slow, restful day, one of the most pleasant I have spent since coming to Cuba. I went for breakfast later than normal. In the elevator, for the first time, I saw a black woman who is not a cleaner—all the dark-skinned people seem to have the most menial jobs in the hotel. "Hola," she said, and I mumbled my greeting back. "You speak English?" she asked. I nodded; pleased to encounter another English-speaking black person in the hotel, the first I had met. English is not really her language, she is from Guadeloupe, she said. For the first time I didn't eat breakfast alone. Lydia James is a lawyer by training

who practices family and criminal law. She comes to Cuba quite often, has been here at least 10 times, both for professional reasons and holiday travel. A tall woman with an easy-going elegance she ate beans and rice while I stuck to my predictable, if unhealthy, fare of eggs and sausages. Unfortunately, she was in a hurry to leave for the airport. But in the half-hour or so, we sat together, I learned quite a bit about Cuba.

It's a very complicated country, she said, so much that you can't see from the surface. Life is hard in this country for ordinary people and black people suffer the most. As I may have observed in the hotel itself, blacks are mostly cleaners and janitors, while mulattoes and whites work the front desk, the bars, and restaurants. People earn 20 pesos a month regardless of their position. They are given rations of basic items such as beans, but these often run out long before the month is over. Coming from Guadeloupe, she is shocked by the levels of poverty here. But she loves the country and the spirit of the people. I wanted to know more about Guadeloupe itself but there wasn't enough time beyond the obvious generalities that, like Martinique, it is a department of France and uses the euro and has a relatively generous welfare system which attracts migrants from other Caribbean islands, especially Haiti and even Francophone Africa. The island is too small, she said matter-of-factly rather than as a complaint, to accommodate all these immigrants. We exchanged contacts, in case I ever visit Guadeloupe and if she ever comes to Chicago, as she hurried to go to pick up her luggage.

In the early afternoon, I decided to go back to the Kreyol festival, which had changed venues to Boyeros near the Plaza de la Revolución. Fortunately, today there was a Cuban woman, Beatriz, a teacher and a journalist, who had been brought by Hilario to translate for Sari. I sat next to the two of them. The program didn't seem to be following the outline I and other participants had been given yesterday, or perhaps things were running late. I found a panel on UNESCO's Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la Humanidad en Cuba discussing the work by the national commission on Cuba's cultural heritage, from folklore and art to music and dance and religion that should have ended two hours ago. One of the speakers was Alicia Gonzalez Gutierrez, the head of the commission's cultural division, a pleasant, Cuban white woman. I was introduced to her yesterday and she speaks English with an accent approximating an American. This was followed by a panel on Haitian cultural influences in Cuba. As hard as Beatriz tried to translate, it was not easy following her.

Before the next session, I decided to call it a day and return to the hotel, and agreed with Sari that she would meet me there after the day's events. Following the scholarly sessions, they returned to yesterday's venue for various cultural activities. Before leaving, I briefly talked to Serge, who has been videotaping the festival activities, and another man whose name I didn't record, who had been doing some translation between Kreyol and Spanish. The man speaks English as well and yesterday he regaled Sari and me with amusing stories of his multiracial and multicultural background. Of Haitian descent, he has white Spanish and even Chinese ancestry; he showed us his identity card on which he is classified as *mulatto*. He said this designation was solely based on skin color. There are three classifications—white, black, and mulatto. Looking at him, a dark-skinned man who could not be mistaken for anything other than black elsewhere, the arbitrariness of these classifications reminded me of South Africa's apartheid where some so-called coloreds were darker than so-called Africans. Of course Cuba is not apartheid South Africa and Cuba's color scheme is firmly tied to Latin America's racial hierarchies, the original purpose and contemporary consequence of which is to place blacks at the bottom, and in this case to minimize Africa's demographic weight in the overall population.

Sari came by the hotel after 6:00 in the evening. She looked exhausted. Fortunately, I had booked dinner at 9:00 p.m. on the 25th floor, which offers panoramic views of Havana. For the next two and half hours we mostly discussed my project and research travels, which, to my surprise, she seemed keen to know about. She even persuaded me to read part of this journal. I was touched and flattered by her interest.

The dinner was fabulous. The restaurant advertises itself as perhaps the best in Havana. Maybe they are right. The ambience is certainly chic, the aesthetics of food presentation impressively stylish. Yet the cost is, by American and Canadian standards—obviously a wrong comparison given differences in income—very cheap. The three-course meal cost 56 pesos. Well, the dessert came as complimentary because we had decided to pretend that this was her birthday—her actual birthday is next Friday. For drinks, we both ordered water. She was surprised to find out that I don't drink alcohol, but reassured that it was not for some high moral purpose. She drinks occasionally, but didn't feel like drinking tonight. We found out each other's tastes in music, cinema, television programs, travel, and food. She was relieved by my pedestrian interest in comedies and happily updated me on the most recent episodes of *The Game*, a comedy she also loves. She has seen Cassandra Wilson in concert four times; I have seen her twice and we both love her smoky, sultry, jazz voice. She loves to travel and would like to do a cruise from the Caribbean, along the western African coast from South Africa to Senegal, retracing the Middle Passage. It was great fun, the conversation moving with incredibly familiar ease from the silly to the sublime to the serious.

On the other side of the restaurant was the club. We decided to try it out. But by 11:00 p.m., the band had not yet started playing and Sari decided to return to the place she was staying before it was too late. She felt it would be rude to keep them up late or wake them up. She shouldn't have worried, judging by the streets of Havana which were full of music and people roaming to parties and clubs. More importantly, she wanted to prepare her presentation for tomorrow morning at the Kreyol festival. She would present it in St. Lucian Kreyol, a language she had been trying hard to learn from her father as a way of reconnecting to her Caribbean heritage as a black person born and bred in Canada. I thanked her for a most wonderful evening.

August 3, 2008

I had originally not intended to go back to the Kreyol festival, but I had promised Sari that I would attend her session scheduled for 10:00 a.m. and then return to the hotel for much needed rest and catching up with some writing and reading. To my disappointment when I got there at 9:45 a.m., Sari's session was ending. The next session was a presentation on Haitian Voodoo by an overweight American academic, Grete Tove Viddal. She was the only white person in the audience, but as usual among our paler colleagues, she behaved as if she was the authority doing these poor people a favor and offered the most pedantic presentation accompanied by photos of Voodoo priests and performance in the United States and Haiti, and made predictable claims about the class and religious dynamics of Voodoo practice. I was pleased to see that in the question-and-answer period she was totally ignored as the Haitians in the group debated among themselves about rather arcane points in Voodoo religion. Leading the debate were Serge and a rather loud Haitian doctor based in Minnesota, Acene Jean Pierre, who, for part of the day, took turns with Beatrice translating for me and Sari.

After a couple of other sessions, one a retrospective on the 2005 Kreyol Festival and perspective on Kreyol in the twenty-first century by a linguist, the group boarded a bus back to the Casa de la Cultura de la Habana Vieja for the closing ceremonies. Hilario gave the closing remarks, thanking everyone who had participated, including the few of us from out of the country. The way he spoke, one would have thought I had come from Malawi. This was followed by three musical and dance performances; the first and third a repeat of the opening by Hilario's daughter and her band, and the last by the ensemble of energetic drummers, singers, and dancers that had so electrified us earlier. As two days ago, watching them, one found oneself almost sweating with enthusiasm at the sheer power and suppleness of their youthful bodies. The final one was a Haitian group composed of three old women and four young male drummers. The band leader held a Haitian flag, and together, with one of the women and several female dancers, each would erupt in front of the singers, and with their dresses made out of the colors of the Haitian flag, mesmerize us with their intricate foot-work, swaying hips, and flying dresses. The male vocalist had the voice of a volcano. The band leader, who Sari and I had run into along the Malecón on Saturday, grinned triumphantly whenever our eyes caught each other; he later came to get my opinion of the performance. He was mighty pleased when I told him that they could out-perform any troupe in Africa. He hugged me ferociously. At the end of the last performance, we all joined the dancers whom, with my stiffening bones, I simply could not keep up with. Sari was busy video-taping everything. She looked generally dejected, saying she was feeling sick and tired, for she had spent much of the night preparing for her presentation and had barely slept four hours. She was anxious to go back to the resort for some rest. As is customary here, we kissed on the checks, wished each other well, and expressed the hope that we would meet again one day.

By the time I returned to the hotel it was early evening and from the window of my hotel room I could see huge crowds stretching along the Malecón with the carnival. When the sun had completely gone down, although it was still light outside, I went to the Malecón. The floats were gone but the merry crowds were still milling around the street bars and kiosks—some dancing to the rowdy music, oblivious to the slight drizzle. I took shelter a couple of times and marveled at the exhilarating orderliness of the multicolored, multigenerational, festive crowds. I walked past the National Hotel and back to my hotel, for once wishing I had a video camera to capture the extraordinary scenes of post-carnival reverie, Cuban-style. And I wished a Cuban was walking around with me: my foreignness was glaring from the fact that I was walking alone. Twice, taxi drivers stopped and asked if I needed a ride. For the most part, of course, nobody paid me any mind. My anonymity was strangely reassuring, a sign, I thought to myself, of Cuba's acknowledgement of its unadulterated black presence alongside the mulatto and white majority.

After three days of festivals and English conversations with Sari, I was ready to go back to my old routine of interviews, reading, writing, and eating by myself and conversing in my mind.

August 4, 2008

It has been three days since I last saw Rita. She came 15 minutes late looking especially smart, hair pulled back in a pony-tail and wearing a black jacket in spite of the heat, which by that time was already oppressively humid.

Before we took a taxi to go to our scheduled meeting at the Anthropological Institute of Cuba she asked if we could sit down to talk business. She opened a file and showed me an invoice she had prepared for me to sign. She had already indicated when we first met that I would need to pay Professor Castaneda, which I had reluctantly agreed to. She asked for an additional 200 pesos for other academics, an extra 100 pesos to go to the town of Matanzas, and the biggest shocker of them all 600 pesos for her program, and a tip for her! I was a little bewildered, for she had never indicated payment for her program. That's interesting, is all I could say at the beginning and asked that we leave for our appointment. In the taxi, I told her I would pay up to the amount allowed for in my research grant. I tried to be as professional about it as possible.

The Anthropological Institute is in Old Havana. When we entered the main office, two people were waiting for us. The large office had several desks, probably separate work spaces for different researchers, and cabinets all cluttered with files and dusty books. We sat at a large conference table facing the two researchers, Pablo Rodriguez, one of Cuba's leading social anthropologists, and a much younger woman, Rachel Pescoso Molina who seemed to be suffering from a cold, with her constant sniffing.

Pablo took the lead in explaining the work of the Institute and his own research. The Institute was one of the first organizations created by the new revolutionary government in 1960. Until two years ago, it was a center. Originally it focused on folklore, but over the years its focus has expanded to include a wide range of fields of inquiry. One of its primary missions remains to investigate the influence of Africans in Cuba, a field that includes key scholars such as Romula la Chatangeria, Alberto Pedro, and Erne Firado. One of the most important things the Institute has produced is an ethnological atlas of Cuba. Currently the Institute is working on six major projects: first, a project on the cocoa industry; second, a project on marginalization, exclusion and poverty; third, a project on the black market and informal economy and criminality during what is called the Special Period, the period when Cuba liberalized its economy to survive the collapse of its trade with the Soviet Union following the latter's demise; fourth, work culture in the tourist industry; fifth, children's punishment; and finally, religions. He asked what would be my interest for further discussion. I wanted him to periodize the history of marginalization, exclusion, and poverty.

Before the revolution, the socioeconomic situation in Cuba was similar to that found in the capitalist, neocolonial, peripheral countries. Cuba was dependent on the cyclical sugar economy, which was active for six months out of the year. Essentially, this was a continuation of the colonial economy. Poverty was widespread in the country, as is evident in two major surveys of Cuban poverty and social structure produced in 1934 and 1952.

Since the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban political economy and society have undergone three major periods. The first was during the 1960s and was characterized by the destruction of the prevailing socioeconomic structure of the neocolonial capitalist order. This period witnessed mass participation and empowerment and economic changes that transformed the nature of poverty. A 1960 study showed that the nature and psychology of poverty were being transformed because of the social redistribution of resources, both economic and cultural. The literacy campaign is a good example of this, which was characterized by mass participation, and the emergence of a new sense of awareness and empowerment.

The second period lasted from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, during which the revolution was consolidated — he preferred the word established. New institutions were created; in fact, one year, for example, was the year of institutionalization. Also during this period,

trade with socialist countries expanded, the economy grew relatively rapidly, and a base was created for universal access to health care and education. Consequently, poverty was greatly reduced and the class structure and hierarchies changed. The idea of rich people disappeared. Poor community areas inside the cities and around the countryside disappeared as new houses were built, although 20% of the population remained at risk. An important expression of the institutionalization of the new social order was the fact that the government allowed people to own their own houses; 90% did. Mortgages were low. Rodriguez mentioned that he got his house with a mortgage of 5,000 convertible pesos (popular known as CUC; 1 CUC=1 U.S.\$), which he remodeled to add three new levels, each with three bedrooms, bathrooms, a dining room, and a balcony. He also added a garden and its value is now an estimated \$200,000. Housing was the principal agenda of the revolution during this period. Ninety percent of residents got access to safe drinking water, which is extremely crucial to social well-being. He gave atrocious examples from Angola where he spent two years and co-authored two books on the social and ethnic process, economy, and society in Huambo. Ninety-five percent of Cubans got access to electricity, although this doesn't mean there are no blackouts, he laughed.

The third period was the crisis period of the 1990s. Like other countries in the developing world, this became a prolonged crisis. But it's important to understand its special significance in Cuba. The first important point is that up until then, 85% of Cuba's trade was with socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and countries in central and eastern Europe. This trade disappeared overnight with the end of the Cold War and Cuba lost all of its commercial links. The second important point is that the bulk of the technology used in Cuba prior to the revolution was American. Cuba's conflict with the United States rendered this technology increasingly obsolete since it could not be replaced and renewed due to the blockade. Up until the turn of the 1990s, Cuba imported technology from the socialist countries, but this technology also became obsolete after the Soviet and eastern European collapse.

He commented bitterly that, while Europe after World War II had the Marshall Plan, Cuba had a blockade after the revolution. This continued following the collapse of trade with its former socialist partners. Cuba had complete energy-dependency on foreign oil. At the height of the crisis, only 13% of industrial capacity was left working. The government tried everything it could, even paying workers' salaries when the workers were not producing anything. This was a crisis of supply, not demand. During the crisis period salaries fell; cooking oil became so expensive—one liter was equivalent to one month's salary. Rita commented that she stopped using oil to cook rice and it was a struggle to get salt, sanitary pads, and other necessities. Pablo Rodriguez resumed with an angry comment that the U.S. blockade is a genocidal act; Cubans feel its effects on their bodies and minds.

Because of the crisis, the government introduced new economic measures including elements of a market economy, new relations with other countries, and the promotion of tourism to earn hard currency from the U.S. dollar to the euro. These measures interrupted the march of the revolution and reintroduced regional and social differences. While the crisis was national in scope, its effects and experiences varied between the eastern part of the country, which was both harder pressed and less able to introduce the changes, and Havana in the west. This resulted in increased migration from the east, which resulted in the emergence of poverty and poor housing and living conditions in Havana. People moved into houses without government permission and the contradictions between the country's philosophy and practice became more glaring. He gave the example

from a few days ago when the electricity company cut power to the non-paying residents in a neighborhood only for those residents to reconnect the power on their own somehow. These illegal acts are part of popular resistance against deteriorating economic and social conditions. The Institute, he concluded, is doing research on all these issues in order to help the government develop better policies.

We turned to Molina who had been looking rather dejected. She perked up when she started speaking about her project on religions. She has been at the Institute for seven or eight months. The Institute's project on African religions covers not only the traditional or indigenous religions but also Islam and Christianity. The project focuses specifically on Palo Monte, Abakwa, Islam, and Christianity and their particularities since they came to Cuba during the colonial period. She was insistent that these were Cuban religions insofar as they lost their original African purity and developed out of syncretism in Cuba. The Spanish colonizers did not allow the Africans to develop their religions, hence the development of religious syncretism. Palo Monte combines Christian and Yoruba ritual objects and practices. Palo Monte does not exist in Nigeria, where Yoruba practices that are considered religious in Cuba are part of popular culture in Nigeria. Similarly, Abakwa in Cuba is different from its Calabar version, although the founders of Abakwa asked for permission to set up their new religion in Cuba for the Calabari. Abakwa is not strictly a religion; it is also a secret society. Islam is relatively small and grew after the colonial period and the revolution with immigrants from Haiti, Mexico, the U.S., Spain, Africa, and the Arab world. Its size and popularity in Cuba is limited because of what she called its strict and closed doctrines in terms of gender and race. For example, the separation of sexes is alien to Cuban religious practices.

Molina was unaware of works depicting the enslaved Africans bringing Islam or those from the Congo region bringing Christianity to the Americas including, perhaps, Cuba. She seemed to fetishize the role of Spain in drawing rather sharp contrasts with Portuguese practices in Brazil and British practices in North America. But her larger point was that the development of African religions in Cuba involved complex processes of translation, transculturation, and transformation was well made. Rodriguez intervened at this point to note the importance of understanding the cyclical movements of cultures and even goods including crops between the Americas and Africa. He joked that younger scholars such as Molina are better placed than scholars of his generation to undertake such work because they can more easily communicate with colleagues elsewhere since they speak English. Molina made her presentation entirely in English. They are the products of the Special Period, Rodriguez took a veiled dig at her. We all seemed pleased with the session and we hugged as we parted.

As we walked to the bookstore to look for the ethnological atlas Rodriguez had mentioned, Rita added that one of the effects of the Special Period was increased migration from Cuba to other countries. For women, many resorted to marrying foreigners, especially Europeans, as a gateway to international migration. With tourism also came increased prostitution, which had almost disappeared in the 1970s, raising concerns among Cuban feminists and women's groups who sought to intervene. Now prostitution is not as bad as it used to be in the 1990s, but it remains a troubling social tendency. The International Bookshop, as it is called on Obispo Boulevard opposite La Moderna Poesia, had a copy of the atlas, which I purchased. They also have a good list of English language books by Cuban scholars who Rita vouched for, some of whom were her professors. I selected several that I plan to purchase before I leave.

When we got to the hotel I gave her the money and signed the receipt. In the evening, I returned to the Serote novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, which I suddenly found engrossing with its vivid, almost poetic language, and its anguishing depiction of life under the apartheid regime. It feels good to re-enter the world of narrative imagination once again after a few days' break!

August 5, 2008

Professor Castaneda was in an especially ebullient mood today. I am sure she was delighted the lectures were ending, as I was. Perhaps it was the prospect of earning so much money—400 CUCs—more than her official annual salary. Or it could simply be, as she stated, she had found me an interesting person to work with, whose intelligence forced her to push herself, to rethink some of the issues. She was thrilled also with how much her English had improved—all she needed was perhaps three months in an English-speaking country for her proficiency to become adequate, she joked. I complimented her on the lectures and her English. I realized as I talked to her for the last time that I liked her a lot. She would make anybody proud to call her their teacher and mentor, or even their mother or grandmother. Rita says she has no children and currently lives alone.

All these mutual compliments came at the end of the lecture, which thankfully, was not on the Haitian Revolution, but on the African presence in the cultural identity of the Caribbean accompanied by lots of Cuban examples and brief remarks on Cuban history. The historical context of the African presence was of course connected to the slave trade and the plantation system, she felt urged to repeat at the beginning. The culture of the Caribbean developed within the same geographical space and is organic to the region. This culture, or cultures, was a product of the struggle and integration between Africans and Europeans, with traces of Amerindian influences. The Africans resisted attempts of deculturation and enculturation by the Europeans. The Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz first pointed out the process of deculturalization and enculturation in Cuba.

The result of this struggle between the Africans and Europeans, was transculturation—the development of a new culture that was neither that of the masters nor the slave. The encounters encompassed all spheres—social, historic, political, economic, cultural, and biological. The new synthesis that emerged was characterized by the culture of the oppressed. She lost me on this point. If I understood her correctly, she was trying to stress that the enslaved Africans and their descendants created, even when they were oppressed and marginalized, spaces of resistance and self-affirmation. They would feign subservience while maintaining a space of liberty in their minds. The African people, in short, were very strong, not weak, and that is why their biological and cultural presence remains so powerful today and can be seen in such public spectacles as carnival, which is going on right now. Most of the dancers and musicians in the carnival, she observed, are black.

In discussing the characteristics of the new synthesis, Professor Castaneda argued that Caribbean identity has similarities and differences. There is debate whether in the Caribbean you can speak of one or several cultures. At any rate, differences among the cultures of the Caribbean emerged due to the existence of different metropolises and the relative demographic weight of the slaves and their resistance activities against deculturation. She

identified the following as specific elements of Caribbean culture, although it wasn't clear what she meant specifically: the history, the dominant language of *criolla*, the type of life, cultural syncretism, and struggles by slaves for liberty and dignity.

Professor Castaneda contends that different types of communities emerged, which underscores the complexity of Caribbean cultural identity. First to emerge, were what she calls black communities, which were influenced by colonial society. These included communities created before and after abolition which sought to accommodate themselves to slave or post-emancipation societies. Some communities were despised in colonial society, as was the case in Cuba with the so-called *Negro bozales*. The second were what she calls African communities, where the African cultural model persisted and was maintained. Maroon societies are a typical example of such communities. Suriname and Guyana still have African communities today whose cultural practices and expression, from the style of clothes to religion, reflect their African roots.

She discussed three main cultural manifestations of African origin: first, religion; second, music and dance; and third, language and literature. She believes that if one wants to understand the African contributions in all their magnitude, one has to go to religion because religion undergirds and regulates all the activities of a people, including the non-believers. This certainly is true in the black and African communities, as can be seen in such an ostensibly secular festival as carnival, in which different Orishas are represented by different colors, foods, etc. Once upon a time, some used to say African religions were not religions but superstitions and fetishisms. They are of course religions with all the characteristics of other religions.

Professor Castaneda distinguished between what she calls *homogenous* and *heterogeneous* African religions. The former refers to the religions that came from Africa. In Cuba, they include Lucumi and Nanigo, which were used by slaves and Afro-Cubans to defend themselves. Followers of Nanigo were imagined to be dangerous and this made many people, including whites, afraid of them. They have what she called *pretty* ceremonies; she stood up to demonstrate how they dance, with little bells jingling around their waist. They wear clothes made of sugarcane fiber. They look very pretty, she repeated as she sat down. The religion is only for men, not women. In Haiti there is Rada and in Trinidad, Shango.

The heterogeneous religions are those that combine multiple African influences and European influences; in other words, they combine master and slave religions. The African influences include those from the Congo and wider Bantu cultures. Examples of homogeneous religions include the Pedro Complex in Haiti, while those that combine master and slave religions can be seen in Afro-Baptist and other protestant churches. One such protestant church is the Afro-Baptist church she visited in Anders. In Spanish America, unlike in the English Caribbean and the U.S., African religious experiences are much stronger. Professor Castaneda attributed this to the fact that in Spain, because of the Moorish influence and closeness to Africa, African religions in Spanish colonies were more familiar and tolerated. In the Antilles, groups such as the Shakers and Shouters can be seen as some type of the heterogeneous religions.

The African religions facilitated the growth of collective identities and associations among black people. These identities assumed different names in different territories—*terreiro*, *tende*, and *cabildo* in Cuba, out of which emerged the carnival (originally a festival for slaves on January 6), and *secta* or *centro*. These religions created a religious superstructure that permitted physical and cultural integration of the black population in the Americas

and the Caribbean and helped them to obtain spiritual independence. Religion was the most powerful transmitter of the essential values of Afro-American negritude, which are present in all cultural manifestations in the Caribbean.

Music and dance constitute the second most important area of African contribution to Caribbean culture. In anthropological terms, Africa has many cultures, each of which has different types of music, such as ritual music, secular music, war music, party music, work music, and music for other functions. The fundamental religious aspects of Caribbean culture in terms of liturgy and African religion are manifested through music and dance, although there are different dimensions and manifestations. She gave several examples. In French Guyana, the *boni* who are descendants of eighteenth-century runaway slaves and live on the border maintain the secret cult to the gods of Yaguar of the Koromantis and they use drums called *apib*. In Guyana, the songs for work and party preserve the original language while others are sung in Creole. In Colombia, various musical forms that have survived include the *Cumbia*, *muplee*, *bullerengue* and *currulao*. In Cuba, the *cabildos* were the places where African traditions were preserved. January 6 was the day of festival when various groups, called *comparsas*, competed. As she said before, this evolved into the modern carnival.

Different African ethnicities have left varied influences in Caribbean dance. The contributions from Dahomey are expressed in the societies of *tumba francesa*, a dance complex of the Carabalís. In Cuba, the more important contributions were made by the Nanigos because they contributed to Afro-Cuban transculturalization. From the Congo came the influences of the *rumba*, *guaguanco* and *columbia*. The Nanigo poly-rhythm carries significance in various forms and styles of Cuban music from folkloric music, to popular, theatrical, symphonic, operatic, and choral music. Before the revolution these influences were not discussed, for African contributions were regarded as countercultural.

African musical contributions included instruments. The most important were the membranophones, including drums with one or two patches. There were also the percussion instruments, *sonajas*, made out of iron and shaped in different forms, such as the beautiful little bells used in the Antilles and Suriname. Overall, the drums and *sonajas* constitute the bases of contemporary Afro-American music.

Finally, Professor Castaneda spoke about African contributions in language and literature. She quoted Edward Kamau Braithwaite, my old colleague at the University of the West Indies, who said that in order to understand Caribbean literature it is necessary to include oral literature. She beamed when she recalled Braithwaite's visit to Cuba. She loved him, she said, in the platonic sense; she added quickly, her face smiling. Proverbs such as *el mento* in Jamaica and *al shanto* in Guyana, and popular songs in many other places carry within them a lot of information and imaginative power. African proverbs and creativity are still present across the Caribbean.

In terms of language, African influences can be seen in Creole. Creole language has a common structure rooted in the languages of West Africa. In other words, all the Creole languages of the Caribbean have a monogenesis that entails an Afro-genesis. This is true of French Creole, Papiamentu, Sranan Tongo, and Dyuka from Suriname. During the colonial period these were not regarded as languages, but recent studies have clearly shown that Creole is a literary language. Besides the development of Creole languages, African words have entered into Standard English and Spanish used in the Caribbean. Professor Castaneda gave references to the *Dictionaries of Jamaican English* published in 1967, which

identified 500 words with an African entomology, and Fernando Ortiz's *Glosario de Afronegrismos* that identified 1,200 African terms used in Cuban Spanish.

Professor Castaneda beamed with an engaging smile as she came to the end of the lecture. At that moment, as if on cue, the phone rang. Rita, she said, as if that was an unwelcome intrusion to her thoughts. Rita later joined us as Professor Castaneda was talking about Cuban history. She seemed a little tense. The professor said little that I did not already know in broad outlines but I was pleased to get her take on Cuban history. She insisted on the central role played by blacks in Cuban history. Slavery constituted the longest period of Cuban history. During this period, slaves played a crucial role in the creation of Cuban society and nationality in different ways from the intellectual to the culinary. Throughout slavery, blacks were engaged in struggles for freedom, including maroonage, which presaged the struggle for independence. Indeed, black people were the first to explicitly fight for Cuban independence. Following the Haitian Revolution, Jose Antonio Aponte led an insurrection, a rebellion in 1812 for independence. During the three independence wars of 1808—1898 according to recent research, a lot of black people participated, some as military and political leaders, at a time when the majority of their people were still slaves, as slavery was only abolished in 1886. Black people thus played two major roles in Cuba's independence wars: first, as leaders, an example being Antonio Maceo who was born in Santiago de Cuba and died in Havana, Diero Mancaro, and many others; and second as patriots and soldiers.

The American intervention and occupation brought new forms of segregation and occupation. To begin with, the black troops, the *mambisas*, were disarmed and many were even killed. During the republican period which lasted from 1902 to 1958 and was characterized by two tyrannies and one brief revolutionary government, there was racism in Cuba, which, however, differs from that in the United States. Segregation was most evident in the upper classes. It existed in the lower classes ideologically but had different characteristics. Occasionally, blacks were accepted in the upper ranks of society, but, by and large, they were excluded. She recalled she wanted to go to an exclusively white school where in the first year she was the only black student. In her second year, other blacks arrived. Her best friend was a rich white girl. But this was rare. Blacks did not want to go to white institutions and at these institutions blacks were not wanted.

At the beginning of the revolution, it appeared that racism would be erased. Clubs of the rich were open to people of all races and classes, education was made free from kindergarten to university, work opportunities opened up for blacks, domestics began to work in banks. Fidel Castro was entirely sincere about eliminating racism, about improving and equalizing opportunities for blacks. He reminded people that twice his life had been saved by blacks. During the Special Period, the negative aspects of the Cuban past and society re-emerged. Emphasis on foreign tourism led to the closure of hotels to Cubans until very recently. Cubans lost dignity, even physical weight as their diets diminished. Tourism facilitated the re-emergence of prostitution and necessitated changes in the penal codes against the social vices associated with it including pedophilia. In this context, racism began to reappear in access to jobs and in living standards as blacks had less access to foreign remittances from relatives who had fled Cuba, most of whom were white.

Ever since the revolution, the government has been committed to eliminating racism by elevating the place of black culture in Cuban society, which had previously been despised as backward. By giving black culture its rightful place in Cuban society, the government has been able to preserve the unity of the nation despite the problems associated with the

Special Period. The African heritage in Cuba is present and alive and well. There are more blacks in the government hierarchy and in the professions than ever before. Interestingly, she observed, in the academic and intellectual fields, blacks are under-represented in the humanities. She attributed this to their poor family backgrounds and lack of cultural capital for success in the humanities as compared to the more occupational fields.

I asked Professor Castaneda about debates in Cuban historiography. She said there were many approaches depending on a scholar's area of specialization, intellectual level, and political specialization. Many are Marxists in their analyses, but she finds some vulgarize Marxism. For her it is important to keep an open mind, to incorporate elements from different theories and take the best from them. The problem, as far as she is concerned, is not the name of a particular theory or analytical approach but its capacity to analyze and improve the human condition. The social sciences are always developing so one has to be open, to consider and incorporate new approaches if necessary. She gave the example of what she wrote 20 years ago, which she wouldn't write now because she has a new point of view and information.

I could not have wished for a more edifying end to my conversations—the lectures—with this remarkable scholar, one of Cuba's most renowned black female intellectuals. I felt privileged to have spent so much time with her and told her so. She appeared genuinely moved by my sense of appreciation. She wanted my business card, which I had left in the hotel.

Rita walked out with me as I went to pick up the card. Returning to give the card to Professor Castaneda, the latter looked even happier than when I left her a few moments ago. I happily sat with her chatting for the next 10 minutes. She is truly a lovely woman.

The evening turned out to be lovely as well. Hilario had asked me to join him and a couple of other guests at his house for dinner. Rita said if I wanted to, I should meet him at the radio station. Promptly at 4:00 p.m. I was there and Hilario and Serge met me at the entrance of the building where I waited for them. We walked about a mile to catch a bus, number 16, from Central Habana to his neighborhood in Alta Habana near the airport, a journey that took nearly 45 minutes. Alta Habana is a vast housing estate of Soviet style, brutal-looking apartment blocks of various sizes from five to 15 floors each. There were people everywhere, children playing basketball or taking rides in the dusty playground or riding a horse-drawn carriage on the road; shirtless men playing card games on verandas or under trees, couples or individuals hanging on their balconies watching the world go by or sipping drinks; vendors peddling their measly wares; and customers crowding kiosks that sold fruits and vegetables and shops that sold dry groceries; and music booming from every direction.

It was a dense, noisy, vibrant world experienced more outside rather than inside the small apartments, if Hilario's tiny one-room apartment was any guide. We sat on the patio on the ground level, cooled by the evening breeze and a fan and delicious guava juice and cold sodas, beer, and hard liquor for Serge, Hilario and a couple of other people present. Hilario's wife was in the kitchen, I noticed, preparing dinner. It was a lovely dinner of chicken, beans, rice, fried banana cakes, and avocado. The conversation focused largely on Haiti and was in Creole, which Serge occasionally translated. As we came to Hilario's place, Serge had explained what he thought was at the heart of Haiti's tragedy, the combustible brew of a bankrupt political class and rapacious American imperialism. Aristide made some strategic mistakes which the opposition used to oust him. This included his refusal to allow for new voting for disputed senate results. But his ouster was

primarily driven by the social, rather than merely the political threat his rule posed to the Haitian elites. He mobilized the hopes and aspirations of the long-suffering poor and the elites were determined to crush him and his own stubbornness—he refused to take constructive political advice—and his downfall was facilitated by the work of his opponents. But his popularity cannot be denied, as evidenced by the thousands of people who recently celebrated his birthday in Haiti.

Hilario walked us back to the main road for us to catch our respective buses. I took bus 16 back to the hotel. It was now full of young people, many of them lusty couples on their way to enjoy the night of delights of Central Habana, including, perhaps, the carnival on the Malecón.

August 6, 2008

Rita looked exceptionally excited today. When we went to visit what is called the California Project not far from the hotel, she spoke with enthusiasm that I have not seen before.

Ms. Barbara Oliver, head of the project, welcomed us into her apartment and offered us coffee, which we thankfully declined. An intense but friendly woman who seemed to enjoy her smoking, she had prepared a handout describing the project, which Rita enthusiastically tried to translate on the spot. I thought that perhaps she could have done that later, but Barbara didn't seem to mind. That gave her an opportunity to take several telephone calls. When she finally had a chance to speak, she repeated much of the information on the handout, but added invaluable personal insights and experiences.

The project was initiated during the Special Period when conditions deteriorated for residents of this already relatively deprived community. In fact, before the project was initiated the area had a bad reputation and there was no social organization to help improve matters. The area was notorious for its poor, unsanitary housing conditions, high unemployment and low income, negative attitudes of the inhabitants toward the authorities, suspicions of strangers and outsiders, as well as hopes that perhaps the future would bring improvements. The project was proposed by an academic in 1994 who sought to bring intellectuals and artists together with unions and the community assisted by the government and foreign donors and improve the quality of life of the community and use the experience of the California Project as a model to improve similar communities in Havana and nationally.

When the project was first proposed, people in the community were suspicious and doubtful. Barbara was elected as the community representative and many meetings were held and people were won over. The project started in 1995 and they approached different institutions, including the government and Cuban and foreign foundations, for financial and other forms of support. Of great concern were sanitary conditions. Previously, inhabitants of the area had access to one facility. Architects who were contracted suggested demolishing the building completely. However, the community supported reconstruction of the building, which now provides each residence with its own sanitation and upper-level rooms for more space. Also critical in the reconstruction was the incorporation of culture, both spaces for religious objects in each residence, common spaces for cultural activities, and a sacred tree in the square in the middle of the building. In fact, in recognition

of the Santeria faith of most of the inhabitants of the building, the name of the neighborhood was changed officially from California to Concha Mocoyn after the sacred tree that is an important symbol in Cuban culture.

Thus, the reconstruction sought to incorporate the culture and religiosity of the community to give the inhabitants a sense of belonging, solidarity, and pride. The project sought to maintain and increase the cohesion of the community and its well-being through social and cultural activities. In short, the project provided new opportunities and jobs through training and artistic and cultural creativity. Through the project, new opportunities for education, health, and sports became available. She smiled with satisfaction, exposing her gapped teeth as she told us that because of the project she improved her formal education. Before the project started, she had a twelfth-grade education and was a manager of a day-care center. At different educational centers she pursued and passed several courses in project management, social communications, and ceramics and painting taught by a famous Cuban painter. In 2003, she recalled, there was a celebration of the 4th Biennial of Visual Arts in Cuba. She knows other members of the community who have since become doctors, nurses, and teachers. Thus, many people have improved their lives by acquiring professional qualifications.

One of the primary objectives of the California Project was to increase the independence and the capacity of black men and women to defend their rights as black people. In fact, one of the first donors to the project was Pablo Muñoz, a black musician. Rita intervened and spoke with passion how her organization sought to attract foreign support and donations for the project. Among the American NGOs they worked with was Global Exchange based in California—she chuckled at the two Californias assisting each other. In the 1990s, the area was full of buses bringing foreign visitors to the project. From these donations, supplies and medicines were provided to the community. It is important to remember that the Special Period hit the black community particularly bad.

The majority of the Cubans receiving remittances from abroad were white or already relatively wealthy. We also need to remember that Cuban migrants in the U.S. received special treatment compared, to say, Haitians. Whites could also access support from Spain. Black Cubans, on the other hand, did not have much external support, not from Africa certainly, and not much from remittances, so the role of projects such as this was particularly crucial. This, Barbara underlined, has been the special tragedy of African diasporas, which, unlike the Chinese or Jewish diasporas, often have little external support from other diasporas and their original homeland in moments of crisis. Her passion and insight gave me a newfound respect for her and reminded me why I liked her when I first met her.

Both Barbara and Rita noted that this neighborhood has a special history in Afro-Cuban culture. The great Afro-Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo used to organize rumba music performances here. Born in 1915, he was killed in 1948. Since then the area has hosted or been visited by important black artists. Barbara spoke proudly of hosting Angela Davis, Danny Glover, and a delegation from TransAfrica. The arts have always been important to blacks because it was one of the few avenues open to blacks after abolition. Among the important Afro-Cuban artists who have visited this area were Bola de Nieve, Olga Guillot, and Celia Cruz.

After the interview, Barbara proudly took us around her apartment, from the living room where we had been sitting to the dining room, the kitchen that led to the balcony, the bedroom on the first floor, and the two rooms up the stairs which we didn't go into.

The rooms were small and tidy, with religious objects neatly tucked in the corner and painted ceramics hanging on the wall of the living room. Then she took us on a tour of the compound to the office with computers and a television and the all-purpose hall that served as a classroom for after-school activities for the kids. The project has become so successful, Rita said as we came to the end of the tour, that it serves as a model across the country where other poor communities adopted and adapted it to serve their specific circumstances. As we left, I could no longer look at the dilapidated neighborhoods in the same way: behind them were people like Barbara determined to improve their lives against great odds and succeeding in empowering themselves.

I only had an hour or so of rest before going to the lobby to meet Beatriz who had called yesterday to show me around the city. She said she worked in a building next to the hotel so this was no bother. She came promptly at 3:00 p.m. The sun was ruthlessly hot and I regretted forgetting my cap as we walked from the hotel along the Malecón all the way to the harbor around Parque La Maestranza. We made several stops, first, at an open air establishment near the high-rise hospital facing the Malecón where we sat for more than an hour talking and listening to the music blaring out of the loudspeakers and, for me, watching people. Our next stop was at an open air café where, against better judgment I bought fried chicken and French fries soaked in dripping oil, followed by the park next to the harbor whose waters were as black as tar and smelled awful. We visited many of the places in old Havana that I had already been to but, not wanting to offend her, I acted like I was seeing them for the first time.

By the time we started walking back it had become considerably cooler and the trucks carrying the carnival floats that had been stationed near the park had left. Along the Malecón we stopped by an entertainment complex of open air bars and restaurants, which also had a stage where a woman was belting out a popular song and later three teenagers rapped furiously, and a playground where shrieking kids played. Once again, I was struck by the sense of safety and camaraderie, the joyousness of the crowds, whatever their problems might be. We ended up at the carnival in front of the National Hotel where we saw spectacular sights and heard throbbing music that made one want to dance. I was struck by how orderly the ecstatic crowds were. By 10:30 p.m. I was ready to call it a day and thanked Beatriz for her generosity in taking me around.

I learned a lot from her about the achievements and challenges facing Cuban society. She is a patriotic Cuban who clearly adores her country. Although she has never traveled abroad, she is convinced that Cuba has one of the best social service systems in the world. She rattled off the features of the system with compelling conviction—the free education, the free health care, and the guarantees of a minimum standard of living for everyone. She also spoke enthusiastically about Cubans' humanity and legendary love of children. She recalled the incident on a bus yesterday when a boy seemed to be losing his breath and the bus stopped and the passengers fussed over the boy until he felt better; how people will come to your aid if you are sick, recalling the help she received when her mother was ill. The state will even pay neighbors to look after each other. And old people are treated with dignity; physical exercise and special events are organized to keep them busy and active members of society. But she was also acutely aware and critical of Cuba's failings.

She was particularly bitter about the low incomes, a problem that afflicts black Cubans, she said, almost echoing Rita, like herself who had no relatives abroad who could send them remittances. She and her aunt couldn't make ends meet with their meager incomes. Her aunt has been trying to go to Jamaica for years but can't raise the 400 pesos or so

required for the plane ticket. The fact that people are paid similar wages regardless of the level of work or education leads to low morale and rudeness at work. Outside the tourists' hotels, the level of service is quite poor because the workers don't care if customers buy or not since they are guaranteed their low pay. Because of this, you find highly qualified people—say, doctors, engineers, or teachers—preferring to work in the tourist industry or become petty traders where they can make more money. For women, another option is prostitution, which is terrible, but an option some have chosen. You see some women who were prostitutes when they were younger who now own beautiful houses and live in good neighborhoods.

She chafed, based on her aunt's experiences, at the travel restrictions. Cubans are not allowed to travel abroad without special permission or invitation. Her aunt has a Jamaican passport, which she got as a Jamaican descendant, although she was born in Cuba, but she can't travel because she has no money for the airfare. And there is the problem with race, not so much in terms of overt racist attitudes, but in terms of access to opportunities. Blacks dominate the carnival because dancing and music pay so little that they don't interest many white Cubans who love money. The same is true of sports. She noted that those who win prizes in international tournaments do not even get to keep their rewards in full. She would like to go abroad and work for a few years to make some money before returning to Cuba.

Beatriz is 29. She majored in Spanish and studied film. She seemed very bright. I was impressed by her insights and knowledge of the different languages of film and television production, making documentaries and ads, about the scripts she has either written or worked on. She made me see the architecture of Old Havana with new appreciation, explaining the different styles and eras of the buildings—gothic, baroque, rococo, classical, and neo-classical. Behind her exuberance there seems to be a sensitive, sentimental soul; she is deeply concerned about the welfare of her aunt, her remaining primary family member. Her mother died last year, and her brother, a musician, left for Germany three years ago and she hasn't heard from him since. She never mentioned her father.

She wishes her aunt was a little happier, able to achieve her lifelong dream to visit Jamaica. Happiness, she said, can only really come by making other people happy, by trying to make the conditions of those around you better. But she has no illusions that it is possible to create a perfect society; human imperfections will always remain and frustrate the best intentions and social experiments, such as Cuba's socialism. She would like to get married and have kids, for she loves children. She joked about Cuban dating habits, how men look at women, how they talk to them, the promises they often make, the terms of endearment they use, and their propensity to have multiple partners. She offered to show me other parts of Havana in the next few days if I so wished. I will most likely take her up on it on Sunday, my last free day in Havana.

August 7, 2008

I finally got out of Havana. We left for Matanzas a little after 8:30 a.m. Rita brought her 17-year-old daughter and her daughter's boyfriend. For much of the journey the two young love birds paid us no mind, focusing their attention on each other, stealing touches and gazes of affection. Occasionally Rita's eyes and mine would meet as we sighed with parental fascination and concern.

It was a beautiful drive except for the car itself that Rita had rented. It came with a driver, but it was the worst jalopy I had ever seen; straight out of a junk yard for car wrecks. Save for the seat cushions, it had lost all internal paneling, it had no windows, and the driver's door kept opening and he would bang it ferociously. Rita apologized, saying the original car she had booked had broken down and the owner had offered this instead. The driver, a white Cuban, was wearing a white vest and seemed perfectly at ease driving this contraption whose electric wires dangled openly under the steering wheel. And throughout the trip I could smell gas, which was a cause of some worry. But we made it to Matanzas without any problem.

From my hotel we passed under the famous tunnel, the pride of Havana, built by a French company that runs under a narrow isthmus; through Habana del Este, then Alamar, a town originally built by the Soviets whose infrastructure, Rita said, was much poorer than in Havana; past Tarará which hosted children from the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union and where Ché Guevara used to stay because of his asthmatic condition; across the gorgeous Santa Maria Beach; then Santa Cruz with its Habana Club factory complex and neat residences. Along the two-lane highway, there were luxuriant trees that gradually gave way to more sparse vegetation and occasional concentrations of palm trees. The closer we got to Matanzas, the more breathtaking the views of the vast valley became. Spoiling the landscape were the ugly metal protrusions of rigs for oil exploration. For a long stretch, the road ran close to the sea with its crystal clear waters.

From a distance as we approached Matanzas, the city along the bay looked picturesque. Driving through the city presented a less rosy picture, but the city didn't have the grittiness of Havana. Rita, who had taught at the University of Matanzas for two years, said the housing in Matanzas was much better than in Havana, and she liked coming here for holidays.

We first went to visit the museum at San Severino Castle. Apparently, we had been expected last Thursday and Rita's message that we would come this Thursday instead had not reached the staff at the museum who had organized a full program of activities including performances. Although I could not make out the Spanish I could tell that Rita was apologizing profusely to the two women who ran the museum. She explained briefly what had transpired. It was a pity, she said, for Matanzas is one of the strongest centers for the practitioners of Santería in Cuba and I would miss the ceremonies they had prepared for us. But we could still visit the museum.

Our guide was a skinny white, or at least white-looking, young man wearing his hair in cornrows. He explained that the castle was built in the late seventeenth century and served several functions over the years. All the pieces displayed in the museum were found in the castle. The first room was the archaeology room displaying various items including tobacco pipes, basins, vessels, glass bottles, buttons, ceramics, insignia, plates, bullets, tools, and candle holders. A mural listed key dates in the history of the castle: 1680 when Matanzas was founded and fortifications around the city were built; 1693 saw the beginning of construction of the castle, 1697 saw the abandonment of construction for lack of money, and then in 1731 construction again resumed and was completed in 1745; reconstruction began in 1777, ending in 1879; and in 1998 it was declared by UNESCO a museum of the slave route because of Matanzas' importance to the slave trade.

The second room contained the following: African and Cuban maps showing the main places of origin of the enslaved Africans and their places of destination in Cuba; copies

of slave trade documents from Matanzas port; pictures of some key buildings and sites around Cuba built by slaves, including some famous churches; books on Africans and slavery; those dreadful symbols of slavery—shackles, chains and machetes—and huge pots for cooking slaves' meals; pictures of renowned Afro-Cuban musicians and writers such as Nicolás Guillén, Miguel Failde Pérez, the creator of *danzón*, and José White Lafitte, a composer; and a walking stick of Juan Gilberto Gomez, a patriot, after whom the regional airport is named. A mural lists the dates of slave rebellions in Matanzas, which seem to have been quite frequent indeed in the nineteenth century: 1825, 1832, 1833, 1835, 1837, 1838, 1839, 1841, 1843, 1844, 1851, 1868, 1869, 1879, and 1880. Most of these rebellions occurred on the sugar plantations and mills.

The third room is the Orishas room with artistic representations of 14 Orishas, both male and female. Each is represented in a full-life figure and their individual characteristics are captured on leather batiks behind them. The room is filled with drums carefully placed on animal skins. I was struck that while the male Orisha figure had Negroid features; those of the female Orisha were more ambiguous.

The rest of the building, the guide explained, was under renovation. He took us to the balcony facing the square, on the other side of which were the rooms under renovation. In the middle of the square was an obelisk in memory of the people killed in the war of 1895–1898. He pointed out that UNESCO's designation of Matanzas as a slave route, and of the castle as a slave museum, was in recognition of the slaves who built both the city and the castle. Each province in Cuba has created its own slave routes and commemoration sites.

Our second visit was to a former slave coffee plantation near Caníma River, about 20 minutes' drive from the city. Now reconstructed into a heritage and tourist site, the plantation called Rafetal La Dionisia was built in 1820 by French slavers who fled Haiti after the revolution. The owners, Francisco Rubeiro Duran and his wife Dionisia Le Roi first went to Louisiana, then Havana where they settled in 1813 before relocating to the outskirts of Matanzas on their 130-hectare plantation. They brought with them 160 slaves, among whom women outnumbered men. The couple had nine children—six girls and three boys. They died within eight days of each other in 1834, Dionisia at age 48 and Francisco at age 68. The first-born child assumed control over the plantation, which he renamed after his mother. The history of the slave masters was told in wonderful detail by the current owner, a 79-year-old shriveled white man who happily showed us around. He said his father bought the house and the land from the second family to own the property. None of the slaves is remembered, their personal histories lost to the anonymity of collective labor and production. That was saddening. No less depressing was the fact that the property and its benefits were in the hands of whites, not any of the descendants of the slaves. This is why affirmative action and reparations may be essential indeed to right the continuing consequences of the dreadful wrongs of the past, of this hideous crime against humanity.

My outrage mounted as the tour of the former plantation progressed. Outside the dilapidated coffee storage room were rusty shackles for hands, necks and feet used to keep the slaves under physical control. When he tried to put one of the shackles around his neck, I almost screamed at the withering white man for the desecration. We know how they were put on them, to chain their bodies to permanent servitude, Rita and I seemed to be saying to each other. He explained that the three rooms kept different types of coffee depending on the quality, which was determined by slave women workers. Then he showed

us the four rooms which were used for slave reproduction following the 1820 treaty between Spain and Britain to stop fresh slave shipments to the island; the clandestine slave trade of course continued. In those terrible rooms, one man would be expected to sleep with and impregnate the women! I shuddered in disgust.

Then we were taken to the slave master's house, which looked impressive even by today's standards. The original structure remained intact save for the roof that burned in a fire in 1895. He showed us the principal room, now refitted with tiles; the kitchen, parts of which have the original red floor; and other rooms which he only pointed to, which I guessed were the bedrooms. Then we saw the domestic slave quarters behind the house. In front of the houses, they keep a little farm containing banana trees, pens for chickens and large mice that look as big as rabbits, a tiny pond with a miniscule crocodile, a stable for horses and cattle. In the distance, we were shown the place where slave children were kept as their parent toiled. We walked to a well built by slaves, 58 meters deep, which still functions efficiently today, as does the clock made in 1849 in the slave master's house. A horse is tied to pull the buckets in and out of the well as in the ancient shaduf and saqiya hydraulic machinery of the Nile Valley. Smiling mischievously, he noted that he gets down to clean the well.

Walking back to the main entrance we saw small Orisha objects. Near the entrance was a huge tree, more than two hundred years old, called Ceiba. The African slaves regarded it as sacred because it resembled a baobab with its massive fat trunks, and they paid tribute to their God and gods at its feet. This is the only place they felt at peace. They believed that if they died here their spirits would go back to Africa, and so before death they would ask to be brought here. Next to the sacred tree, at whose base were religious objects, were the five rooms where the slave women were brought to give birth. This was a total system of unmitigated cruelty. I felt angry.

My anger only deepened in the next few moments. The car had a flat tire. As the driver changed the tire, Rita's daughter and boyfriend, who had ignored much of the tour, preferring their mutual infatuation, went horseback riding while Rita and I went to sit by the small restaurant under the fruit trees. We noticed most of the people sitting there were white; besides the two of us, the only blacks were young men and women preparing a dance performance. As we walked back to the car, Rita commented on what we had just seen. For economic and cultural reasons, places like this and leisure resorts tend to be patronized more by white than black families, while blacks are often reduced to lowly paid entertainers. Next to our jalopy were parked five cars, including a Mercedes Benz, and we saw a black jockey leading a group of whites on their horse rides. Imagine horse rides in Auschwitz or any Nazi concentration camp. That is the magnitude of the travesty against the sites of the memories of our suffering. These whites did not come here to remember, let alone atone for slavery, but to have fun horse rides! Clearly, La Dionisia remained a haven of white privilege after almost two hundred years when it was established. In that lay the inhuman criminality of slavery, its enduring ambiguous bequest to a socialist republic.

As if we needed some respite from the burdens of slavery, the humiliations of our history that we had witnessed at the castle and the plantation, we drove to the resort town of Varadero, half an hour from Matanzas. Along the road on one side were sisal plantations and on the other, waters whose clarity and tranquility seemed to cleanse the past of its sins. And Varadero itself, the leading resort town in Cuba, can match any resort town anywhere, with its leisurely traffic, smart, colorful hotels and restaurants,

sanitized cleanliness, and miles of white sands shading into gold. And like most resorts in this part of the world, the beach we ended up at was full of European accents from men and women who have no business exposing their wrinkled leathery skins, pot bellies, or flabby breasts to the elements or disgusted native eyes. But they bring their much-needed foreign currency and so they are tolerated, welcomed, and pampered. The infinite wonders of whiteness; the whiteness of airports, I wrote once in a blog; here the whiteness of beaches, which are, of course, one and the same thing—racialized tourism.

I knew of course that such thoughts were a recipe for a miserable afternoon. So for the next four hours I chose to ignore the overwhelming whiteness around me and relished watching dark-skinned Cubans who passed by or dipped their bodies into the warm, lovely waters of their sea. I went in a couple of times and napped for a while. Rita had left us for what seemed like a long time. She brought back some drinks and snacks. Her daughter and boyfriend were having the time of their lives in the water. Half an hour before we left, Rita finally got into the water as well. She looked happy. It occurred to me I didn't know much about her personal life besides the fact that she had a daughter and a son. Was she married, I wondered. She had once spoken about living in Old Havana with a man for many years. Was that her husband, the father of her children? I realized I had volunteered a lot more personal information; I talked about Cassandra and Natasha all the time. I had also mentioned having a son and being on my second marriage.

We left Varadero later than we had originally planned. On the way back the two teenagers and Rita fell into periodic naps. It was still light outside and in the silence I appreciated the beauty of the countryside even more as the jalopy rumbled its way to Havana. They dropped me off at the hotel at about 8:30 p.m., an amazing 12 hours into Cuba's past and present. I thanked Rita for a wonderful day. The teenagers, now awake, were too engrossed with each other to pay me much attention when I said bye to them. Maybe it was the English!

August 8, 2008

I had the most fascinating interviews of my visit late this afternoon. Rita came to pick me up at 5:00 p.m. to go the house of Tato Quiñones, a renowned Afro-Cuban cultural figure and winner of many awards. A largely self-taught man with an eighth-grade education, he is a man of multiple talents—journalist, film documentarian, researcher, *babalawo*.

A bespectacled man of average height with thinning graying hair, he gave me a firm handshake as he welcomed us into his second-floor apartment, which was filled with bookshelves, paintings, music videos, and certificates of his numerous awards. Rita had indicated that he could discuss virtually any subject I wanted him to, especially religion and music. He is a member of Abakwa. I settled on music. Rita told him I was interested in his views on the history and global impact of Afro-Cuban music.

He began by noting the challenges of defining the very term Afro-Cuban. It is a contentious, even political term which has been subject to a lot of debate, with some disputing that people called Afro-Cubans exist. Nevertheless, if we talk of Afro-Cuban music we are generally referring to music whose origins are in African music and which

was brought here and practiced by the enslaved Africans. Today, African music is of course an integral part of Cuban music, not something that can be separated into its own distinct category. Much of this music was initially preserved through ritual and religious practices and ceremonies. The Africans brought musical instruments, principally drums and percussion instruments, which they not only continued to use and adapt, but were incorporated into other forms of music including symphonic music. He personally knows three symphonic musicians who incorporate drums. But even when the blacks used instruments of European derivation — what he called Cuban instruments — they imposed sonority and morphology from Africa. As an aside, he noted that today there are two sets of drums used, those for secular music that are produced in factories, and those for sacred music made by highly specialized people who are ritually pure according to the religion concerned.

The slave period could be considered the formative years of Afro-Cuban music. During this period, blacks were of course dominated politically, economically, and socially. The culture they brought was equally dominated, demonized, and despised. But the African cultures survived and became a critical part of Cuban culture. The *cabildos*, as associations of the enslaved Africans were called, became crucial sites for the conservation and transmission of African culture, including music.

From around the mid-nineteenth century a new phase began as more slaves became emancipated, culminating in the abolition of slavery. This was a period of integration and active reinterpretation of Afro-Cuban music using western musical instruments. For example, two blacks became internationally renowned musicians; one was a violinist and the other a composer of symphony music who played in some of Europe's most famous musical venues. These musicians and many others like them put black cultural influences into the mainstream of Cuban music.

The watershed in the development and integration of Afro-Cuban music came in the 1920s and 1930s. Before then, Afro-Cuban musical forms such as rumba, son, and conga were seen by the dominant classes as passing fads, marginal musical expressions from the lower social classes. For the dominant elites, anything from Africa was seen pejoratively as barbaric, savage, and cruel. This was true even among black intellectuals who saw abandonment of African-derived expressive culture, including drums, and the adoption of European derived instruments and expressions as a gateway to respectability and higher status. But the interwar period was a moment of social and economic crisis, Rita added, during which a popular backlash against external dependency began to develop, reinforced by the Great Depression and lingering concerns with American imperial ambitions in Cuba. In short, as cultural nationalism grew, the popular embraces of Cuban culture, in which Afro-Cuban cultural expressions were an integral part, intensified.

Thus, in the 1920s began public recognition of the African cultural presence in Cuba as the country was forced to turn inward to deal with the mounting crisis of the interwar period. For the elites, perhaps even more crucial were external influences from Europe. Tato explained quite compellingly that European, and especially French intellectuals and artists discovered Africa in the development of new styles and involvement in the visual arts, from Cubism to surrealism. Dominant Cuban intellectuals and artists who borrowed their cues of modernity from Europe took notice. They discovered their own Africa in Cuba. The recognition of the black presence led to the *negrista* movement in literature and poetry. Black and white writers began to reappraise the black presence in Cuba. At

that point, Tato stood up and picked up several novels from one of the shelves from this period. In addition, he brought out several books, all in Spanish, and documentary videos, including two that he had made: *Ache Moyuba Oricha*, *La Santería en Cuba*; *La Rumba en Cuba*; and the two-volume collection.

This contributed to the rediscovery African culture in music, how deep and extensive African influences already were in Cuban music. And so Afro-Cuban music, which had once been marginalized, was elevated and mainstreamed as *danzón*, *conga*, *son*, and *rumba* were embraced as authentic expressions of Cuban music. *Conga* was whitened and exported to Hollywood where it became globalized. After that it was impossible to deny Afro-Cuban musicians their rightful place in Cuban music; they acquired their cultural citizenship. At that point, Tato stood up again and brought several monumental studies of Cuban music from what looked like a study: *Los Muñequitos de Matanzas*, the four-volume *Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Cuban Music* by Radamés Giro, and the exhaustive work of Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos de la Música Afro-Cubano*.

I wished he could discuss other crucial moments after that. Rita mentioned the importance of the post-World War II era and I was interested in developments following the revolution. Unfortunately, time did not allow for that. His next topic of discussion was equally intriguing, with illustrations to boot. He explained the complex connections and contributions of Cuban music with the clarity and ease of a maestro. He identified two broad sets of influences and connections coming from and into Cuba. Eastern Cuban music has been more tied to Caribbean music from Santo Domingo and Jamaica, while western Cuba has been oriented toward the United States. He began with the latter. The connections between Cuban and U.S. African-derived music go back to the circulation of slave populations. In the nineteenth century in New Orleans there existed Congo Square, which functioned much like the Cuban *cabildos*.

It was in Congo Square that African musical influences were strongest in the U.S., where strenuous efforts were made to proscribe African instruments and influences such as the drum, which African Americans creatively substituted. It was not coincidental, however, that jazz and blues started in Congo Square. Congo Square became the center for visiting Afro-Cuban musicians, it was there that modern Afro-Cuban and African-American musical connections were forged. The connections were strengthened during the American occupation, as some of the Americans stationed in Cuba were black, including musicians. An interesting anecdote of musical history was the fact that the first Afro-Cuban jazz musicians played the new music using the banjo. Clearly, cultural relations between black Cubans and black Americans were early and intense.

Along the eastern part of the island, the Haitian connections and influences loom large. The impact of the Haitian revolution is a crucial part of the story insofar as it brought to Cuba French slave plantation owners and some of their slaves who came with their culture, including music. If you listen to Habana *Conga* and eastern *Conga* you immediately notice the differences, the different accents. Similarly, *rumba* from western Cuba is influenced by Yoruba religion, while from the east it bears strong Voodoo influences. Of course, due to migrations back and forth within Cuba, the regional variations have become less evident as musical styles have become more and more mixed. Santiago de Cuba is the most Caribbean part of Cuba; physically and culturally closest to the other Caribbean islands.

Cuba also shares cultural connections with the continental Caribbean from Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico, through which direct and indirect musical and broader

cultural exchanges continue to take place. Modern technology has quickened the tempo and intensity of these exchanges in all directions. On the African connections he did not say much except to point out that the popularity of Cuban music reflected the familiarity of two aspects of Cuban music to African musical audiences. First, in Central and West Africa, Africans discovered, heard, their own music in Cuban music, which had been conserved in Afro-Cuban religions and transformed under secular Cuban popular music. Second, the Spanish elements of Cuban music bore strong influences from northwestern Africa whose ancestors ruled Spain for centuries and left an indelible impact on the Andalusian music of southern Spain.

For Tato, there can be no question whatsoever that African music influenced and continues to influence Cuban music, which has been mixed with European music, principally Spanish but also French and Portuguese music. One can talk of Cuban music influenced by Africa, but it is less clear that it makes sense to talk of a separate Afro-Cuban music, as such. Even rumba is a cultural manifestation integrating the rhythms of Africa and the melody and harmony of Spanish music, especially from southern Spain. All those genres—rumba, son, danzón, conga—represent the creative integration of African and Spanish musical traditions on Cuban soil.

To illustrate the points he had made, Tato played three discs. The first, called *Lazero Ros, Orisha Aye*, which represents the concentration and transmission of African music in Cuba over numerous generations. It was unmistakable traditional Yoruba music. In Cuba, it has developed as a distinctly religious music. Then he played a disc in which the African rhythmic and Spanish melodic mixtures are evident from a contemporary group playing tribute to the legendary Chano Pozo. This, he said, is neither African nor Spanish music, but Cuban music. As we listened to the songs, he would periodically close his eyes, his lips quivered with the sounds before breaking into an expansive smile of deep satisfaction. Then he played a tune from the great Chano Pozo himself, who was killed in the Bronx in New York by a fellow Cuban in a bar over a drug dispute. The tune, *Mbenda Mbenda*, became a staple of Hollywood films and influenced the development of contemporary Mexican music.

I could have stayed the whole night listening to the music and talking to Tato. I resolved there and then to find a way to bring him to a conference in Chicago for the Global African Diaspora Forum I am planning to launch.

Tato's place was not too far from the Caribbean Association where I had been invited last week to attend the Jamaican Independence day celebrations. August 6 is the actual independence date, but they postponed the event to Friday. Rita was concerned I might get lost so she accompanied me there by taxi and left after she had introduced me to several people, one an elderly woman who lives near Habana Libre with whom I could share a local taxi (these taxis charge a flat rate of one local peso unlike the commercial tourist taxis that have meters and charge in CUCs). The ceremony was supposed to start at 8:00 p.m., but it started more than an hour later after the Jamaican ambassador and her entourage arrived, including a few fellow ambassadors. The ambassador from Grenada sat next to me at the table where I had been placed, adjacent to the ambassadors' table.

There were the usual political speeches of Caribbean solidarity delivered by the president of the Caribbean Association, Cuban-Jamaican solidarity delivered by the representative of the Cuban government and the Jamaican ambassador, respectively. This was followed by a musical variety show. The crowd was at its most rapturous when a Chinese teenage girl played her violin against the backdrop of pulsating rock songs, and when a jazz trumpeter

dressed to the nines belched to the intoxicating rhythms of famous jazz songs. A few performers were embarrassing to watch, for they were trying too hard, including the beautiful young female rapper dressed in jeans so tight it was a mystery how she got them on and a white salsa singer who tried to do with her body what her voice couldn't do.

The hall was packed with young and old, mostly Cuban Jamaicans, and the room was decorated with the Jamaican flag colors of black, green, and gold. Occasionally, a balloon would burst and people would turn. I was famished. Thankfully, they served some snacks—small buns with cheese or salami. Sitting next to the ambassadors' table, I lucked out with a soda! After the musical variety show was over, the real party began as reggae music rocked the house and everyone jumped up to dance in energetic and stylish affirmation of their Jamaican roots. I felt I was back in Jamaica in the early 1980s and when the woman Rita had asked to accompany me back asked that we leave, I told her I would be fine. She looked at me with some suspicion, shook her head, and left.

By 11:30 p.m. I decided to call it a day, although the celebration was still going strong and the ambassador, a short brown woman, as they would say in Jamaica, was still shaking her elderly behind in between talking to people, her country's diaspora, many of whom, like Beatriz's aunt, had never been to their original homeland, which is so close. *So close and yet so far*. A metaphor of the wider African diaspora, most of which have never and will probably never set foot on the continent of their ancestors. Jamaican descendants in Cuba may be kept away by official travel restrictions and lack of resources. The wider African diaspora also generally lacks the resources to travel to Africa, but for even those who can afford to, Africa seems to scare them, as if the pathologization of their ancestral continent will rub off on them, reinforce their own pathologization in the diaspora. And so they dream of going to Europe.

When I got out, I realized I had been a little hasty in dismissing the woman who had offered to get a taxi with me. I did get a taxi alright with a pleasant, English-speaking cab driver who even offered to show me around Havana and gave me his home and cell phone numbers. But he charged me 7 CUCs, almost double what the journey was worth. Perhaps he charged me extra for speaking English to a tired tourist!

August 9, 2008

For my last formal engagement, Rita organized a visit to the Sede del Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba located in a leafy suburb of Havana. We had agreed to meet there at 2:30 p.m. I took a taxi from the hotel to avoid getting lost, although the place was not too far from the hotel. Rita found me waiting for her in the shade next to the center. She paid for the ticket and we went in. Behind, there is a large open-air space for performances, with a small bar and lots of trees in the surrounding grounds which provided much needed shade. The place quickly filled up and soon there were no more seats left, so people stood around the stage.

The performances were opened by a mulatto woman wearing black pants and a long white shirt and a matching cap. Rita tried to translate, but I didn't pay much attention, being more interested in observing the crowds, mostly black, beautiful black people ready for some fun, for traditional Afro-Cuban music. There were children and teenagers and adults and the elderly, dressed in their impeccable, or provocative, or leisurely best; many

in white. Rita saw two old friends from the U.S., two black men, one originally from Jamaica who visits Cuba regularly as a member of an organization of activist friends of Cuba.

The music and dance started with colorful troupes representing Orishas, beginning with Ochun and led by Elena who opens and closes the performance. Ochun's dance and singing was performed by five women clad in bright, yellow, loose flamboyant dresses; five men with covered faces, and three drummers and two vocalists, one male and one female who took turns as the dancers demonstrated with individual and collective flair the characteristic body movements of Ochun. This was followed by the dance of Ogun, and the eight men wielded representations of machetes and palm leaves and wore strips of matching green, yellow, and brown cloth and pink head wraps; some wore grass skirts over their shorts and exposed their taut torsos to the admiring, ecstatic audience. The female singer commanded their movements with her powerful yet simultaneously plaintive, indeed, soulful voice. Next was Oya's dance by three women in vibrant multicolored dresses, and finally the exquisite dancing moves of Yemaya, dark, gorgeous women in blue dresses with white stripes and blue head wraps. Three men played ritual drums intricately decorated with beads and bells.

This was followed by a rap performance by a teenage boy, perhaps 15 or 16, who looked the part with his dark sunglasses, earring, haircut, T-shirt, multicolored shorts, and white tennis shoes. He bopped his head and shoulders up and down and sideways and swung and strutted his legs with the typical boastful machismo of rappers. The crowd loved him.

The real fun of the afternoon came with the rumba performances in which successive groups of singers and dancers, who were later joined by aspiring singers from the crowd, tore up the place with their mesmerizing rhythms, from the drums that screamed with the ancient memories of Africa and the harmonies of the vocalists that evoked the anguish and joys of survival. A group of five old women danced to almost every song; they let their maternal hips vigorously surrender to the seductions of bodily pleasure. Towards the end, the crowd was invited to join in. An ecstatic Rita did. Black people need the release that music and dance provide because our lives have been so painful, so difficult, and continue in some ways today, she said, panting, as she returned to where I was sitting. Go, go, join them, she implored, and I did. For once, even the heat was forgotten. I saw a couple of what looked like white tourists taking pictures and a few others grinning at this strange spectacle of black joy. I felt sorry for them.

I left Rita there with her American friends. I decided to walk back to see more of this well-appointed suburb with its large, beautiful houses, manicured lawns and trees, and apartments and office towers and hotels along President's Avenue. Half an hour later I was back at the hotel, sweating profusely, but pleased with the end of the day and of my formal program in Cuba as organized by Rita.

For the rest of the evening I went back to Serote's apartheid South Africa, which he evokes with haunting power. Reading it now, the cruel senselessness of it all, the illusions of settler colonialism, the indomitable spirits and resistance of the oppressed, have a tragic poignancy that is deeply unsettling. As it happened, before resuming reading the novel I was flipping through television channels to catch some news on CNN. I found an ongoing program on Fidel Castro. He was visiting South Africa, meeting an appreciative President Mandela, being feted as a revolutionary heir in the South African parliament, being warmly welcomed by Sam Nujoma in Namibia, who paid tribute to Cuba's historic role in his country's liberation from apartheid South Africa. There were other scenes and com-

mentaries, Castro in Harlem, New York, the political tributes from left-wing Americans. Angela Davis spoke of her political admiration for Castro; Alice Walker wondered about Castro's alleged inability to dance and gave a banal laugh. It occurred to me that Rita has steered clear of including politicians or political activists in my program. Politics has been trumped by culture. That, I feel, says something, what exactly, I will figure out later. Sleep now beckons.

August 10, 2008

I decided to do absolutely nothing today and just hang around the hotel and my room, reading and taking stock of the trip; and do some domestic chores like washing the dirty clothes that have accumulated over the past three weeks. I hate traveling with dirty clothes. Having run out of money, I can't afford to have them laundered. It felt like I was back in secondary school, memories that brought some inexplicable joy.

When the cleaning lady came in the early afternoon I decided to walk to the National Hotel to check e-mail. Upon my return I found, as always, she had neatly made the bed and changed the towels. Even my pants, which I had left on the bed, were neatly folded. She is friendly, greeting the hotel guests whose rooms are under her charge with utmost courtesy. A short and plump mulatto woman, she told me she has two small children. On Saturdays when she is off she takes them to the beach, she likes to take them to the beach.

I was about to order room service for dinner when I noticed something amiss. The money in my pants I had left on the bed was missing. I checked again and again. I didn't want to believe it. Could she, no, how could she? Maybe it was the person who checks the mini-bar. It wasn't a lot of money but enough for a meal. I felt like reporting it. In the end, I was forced to change some of my remaining dollars. The tax on the exchange rate soured my mood even further. To banish such petty anguish over chump change and character aspersions, I turned to Serote's increasingly searing account of the traumas of apartheid. His characters are so compelling because of their very ordinariness, men and women who simply want to lead normal lives, to be free, to be fully human. It was a pity I hadn't read this novel before. I find myself reading it slower than usual because it's not just the plot that drives the narrative but its very language, its poetry, vividness, its unusual turn of phrase. Not quite as intense as Yvonne Vera's writing; I am attracted to her artistry of describing horror so beautifully.

Once I turned on the television to listen to the news. It was all about the Olympics in Beijing, now overshadowed by the war between Russia and Georgia, another tragic, senseless clash of nationalisms. The gall of American condemnations of Russia when they have been waging brutal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for seven and five years, respectively, was too much to stomach and I quickly returned to Serote's victims and combatants of apartheid, which incidentally the American empire supported and the Soviet empire opposed during the ideological battles of the Cold War fought in hot proxy wars across the Third World, including Africa. And that's when the teeth of Cuba's friendship and solidarity with Africa, with Angola and the liberation forces in Southern Africa were cut. Cuba earned the historic gratitude of progressives across the continent and Southern Africa. No amount of personal inconvenience can make me forget that.

August 11, 2008

Immediately after breakfast I went to the National Hotel to attend to some office-related work and my post-vacation calendar of invitations. I responded to some of the invitations and contacted Kamari Maxime Clarke at Yale to set up possible visiting dates. Altogether, as of now, I have about a dozen invitations beginning with the African Studies center at the University of Toronto on September 11, Lawrence University later in September, Michigan State University also in September, Trent in October and January, the Nairobi Book Fair in September, UIUC in November, South Africa in November, University of Calgary in November, Dalhousie, my alma mater to deliver a Killam lecture in November, Connecticut Central State to receive an Amistad award and give a lecture in February, and the University of Toronto's area studies programs and Centre for Transnational and Diaspora Studies in April. There is no way I can do all these. My criteria will be the political importance of the event, fee being paid, and convenience in terms of time since I will be teaching this semester, in that order.

It is quite flattering to be invited to so many universities and events, but very taxing also, not least on a marriage. I asked Cassandra for her views and she said I could do them all if I was able to. I doubt if she really means it. I think she is a tad bit tired of my frequent trips, and who can blame her. Preparing for the presentations, traveling, sleeping in strange hotels, and the performances of presentation do become quite insane. I have decided to drop out of the conference at the University of Cape Town later this month. I can't stomach a transatlantic flight any time soon, especially if I end up going to Pretoria in November and to Malawi and South Africa for the Christmas holidays with Cassandra and her parents to celebrate Mama Rachel's 75th birthday. As usual, Moza seems determined to make it into a big bash: he has set up an organizing committee, God bless his heart, as Cassandra would say!

I rushed back to the hotel to meet Rita for our farewell at 11:00 a.m. We both looked relieved, not without some regret that the research visit was over. She is a likeable woman. We bonded more when she revealed that she was the only long-serving black member of her institute and confided about the pressures she faced. She is very racially conscious but accepts no excuses for black under-achievement in the name of racism. And her anguish over her daughter reminds me of Natasha at her daughter's age, the stubbornness, obliviousness to the future, the faltering grades, the rebellious discovery of sexuality and boyfriends, and the confused transition from childhood to adulthood. When I asked her about her daughter today, she rolled her eyes—problems, problems, she sighed heavily. Her younger son is apparently quite different, she told me on the day we went to the folklore center, so much easier to deal with, so much more predictable. Maybe because he was younger, I thought to myself. She hopes her daughter will change once she gets into college; that too may help strip her away from her current boyfriend, the object of all her current obsessions.

Ever the professional organizer, Rita apologized that she had not managed to include more scholars, many who were on vacation. She would also have wished to take me to Regla and Guanabacoa, both very historic towns on the edge of Havana. Regla is one of Cuba's earliest cities, founded in 1554 which once served as a transitory capital when Havana was under foreign attack. Rita lived there for a year when she was young. Guanabacoa is important in Afro-Cuban history because it is one of the main centers of Abakwa and the hometown of some of Cuba's legendary black artists, including Rita

Montaner (1900–1958) a singer and actress after whom Rita herself was named by her mother, and Bola de Nieve (1911–1971), the famous musician. She stressed that it is impossible to write about Cuba without writing about religion and culture more generally, and the latter could not be discussed without talking about black life and black cultural producers and artists whose works and performances represented a continuous record of black daily life.

It was now her turn to be formally interviewed. I asked her to explain the development of the women's movement on which she had told me she had done some work and was actively involved. She began by noting that now there was one women's organization called Cuban Women's Federation (FMC). Before the revolution there were many organizations representing different sectors of women, mostly elite women. In general, women were like blacks and peasants in that they were widely discriminated against, as was indeed the case in many parts of the world at that time. In Cuba, gender discrimination and hierarchies represented the combination of Spanish and African patriarchal systems, the result of which was women's marginalization in decision making even if women made enormous contributions to the productive economy. Since, at that time, the economy was not very diverse and was dominated by sugar production, women were excluded from the formal economy, especially the professions. Women in the wage economy were confined to teaching and domestic service. Many were forced into prostitution, which was especially rampant in Havana.

Despite these debilitations, marginalization, and even violence in the home and from the state and society, women participated in revolutionary activities. One of the most important organizations was the Cuban Women of the Centenary of Jose Marti, a progressive organization that fought both for women's liberation and against the Batista dictatorship for a new Cuba. It was allied with other radical groups arrayed against the dictatorship. After the triumph of the revolution, things began to change dramatically for women, largely of course for the better. Castro was very clear that the revolution was also about the liberation of women as a class, as a distinct group of oppressed people in Cuban society. The new revolutionary government introduced new laws and institutional structures to extend and enshrine equal political, civil, economic, and social rights for women, blacks, and poor whites.

Prostitution was closed down as new job opportunities opened up for women. The FMC was created to aid women's progress by increasing women's participation in the economy, society, and politics through training, education, mobilization, and conscientization. The organization exists throughout the country and remains one of the pillars of the revolution together with the CDRs and the unions. It has representation in the United Nations as an NGO. Its long-standing president was Vilma Espin Guillo, Raul Castro's wife who died last year. She participated actively in the revolutionary struggle and fought in the Sierra Maestra where she met Raul. Their daughter is the director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Education, an organization dedicated to gay and lesbian rights. Cuba is one of a few countries where gay and lesbian rights are respected, she said.

I would have wished to quiz her more, to probe the generalities, to find out the role of Afro-Cuban women in the women's movement, the intersection of race and gender in contemporary socialist Cuba, the linkages with feminist movements elsewhere, but I saw her steal quick glances at her watch and so I didn't pursue it. We gave each other body hugs and loud kisses on the cheeks. We promised to keep in touch. I saw her out of the hotel lobby and hailed a taxi to go to the international bookstore to buy books.

Packing my stuff in the evening felt bittersweet. I was ready to go, but realized there was so much more to see and hear on this remarkable island where so many of our people in

the Caribbean live. I realized the visit has had more of an impact than I would have imagined and had realized up to then. I was even cordial to the cleaning woman when I saw her earlier in the afternoon. She smiled as if nothing had happened—maybe she was not the one. I hoped so, but I ignored her hints at a tip: she had left an envelope under the door thanking me and wishing me a safe return home. I was as broke as a church mouse.

Having finished the novel on the madness of apartheid and being unable to sleep, I flipped through the TV channels and realized they had HBO. But 15 minutes into some banal movie, I switched it off and waited for the next day. Finally, some vacation time in Nassau to mark the end of an incredible summer of research travels in five countries before beginning another semester. Suddenly, I felt exhausted.

August 12, 2008

Nothing could dampen my excitement to leave Cuba and start my vacation with Cassandra in the Bahamas. Not the discovery that I was not on the Havana tour's passengers' list to the airport, not being able to change my remaining dollars for a taxi to the airport and for airport tax, not the early morning sweltering heat and humidity. Nothing. Driving to the airport felt like I had been in Cuba for ages, not a mere three weeks. I hope I will be able to visit again, perhaps when President Obama has lifted the embargo!

On the queue for check-in, I met a Ghanaian visiting from New York. For the next two hours we kept each other company and got a new appreciation of the tangled web being forged between the old and new African diasporas. He used to be an engineering student in Cuba and lived here for 14 years before relocating to the U.S. in 2000. Arriving as a penniless immigrant, he decided to go back to school, to get a degree in nursing at Lehman College in New York. He comes to Cuba occasionally to visit his family, a Cuban wife he met while in college and their two children, a 10-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl whom he adores. He told me about the gifts he had bought them—caps, T-shirts, sunglasses, computer games. How proud the kids are to proclaim their cosmopolitan affiliations through their African father who lives in New York, who sends them gifts and money to enable them to enjoy a decent standard of living, including holidays in Varadero. When he visits he comes in a nice, big, fancy car and takes them to fine restaurants to eat burgers and ice cream. But he is also a stern father who wants his son to aspire beyond the stereotypical opportunities open to black Cuban males—music and sports. So he pushes him, demanding good performance in school, respect for elders, and love of God, instilling in him higher and wider ambitions. He didn't say much about his daughter except to say how she looks like a princess with her dark glasses on. He hopes to bring his family to live with him in the U.S.

We took one of those dreadful small planes, but the ride was smooth. At 12:20 p.m. we landed in Nassau. Cuba already seemed so far away in its hemispheric isolation and the incredible vibrancy of its African diasporas. The Bahamas, a predominantly black island, proclaimed its subservient status as a postcolonial, tourist haven quite loudly from the airport to the hotel where Cassandra and I were staying. It all looked so familiar, and coming from Cuba, even comforting, but deeply disturbing. The subjugations of slavery and colonialism seem to have been replaced by the seductive subordination to Euroamerican leisure.

For the next few days, I fell victim to the desire for rest and became a tourist. While we visited museums, various historical sites, and even bookstores, I made no pretense of

trying to do research. That didn't prevent me from complaining about the tour guides and their celebratory narratives of Bahamian history, including whitewashing the sordid records of slavery and colonialism, and the ignorance of many of the people I talked to about the enduring African imprint in Bahamian culture. I recall one young man at the hotel expressing surprise when I told him Bahamian food tasted quite familiar to me. But how, you said you are from Africa, he said. It tastes much like West African food, I responded, where most of your ancestors came from. He looked astonished. But the newfound tourist in me didn't feel inclined for a long conversation on the Bahamian diaspora and its linkages with Africa. The beaches looked so much more attractive after spending weeks of intensive research and reflection in Mexico, Germany, Britain, France, and Cuba.

2009

Spain

May 28, 2009

Today marks the beginning of the last leg of my research travels for the project on Africa diasporas. The anticipation made me wake up earlier—around 5:45 a.m.—than I had set for the alarm—9:00 a.m. Perhaps it was also the excitement about the official announcement of my appointment as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University (LMU). I turned down a counter-offer from UIC to be Interim Dean of the Graduate College, and withdrew from consideration for the position of Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Dean of the Honors College, for which I was one of two finalists. It's been a long road from St. Patrick's and Chancellor College to this milestone. I feel both proud and humbled. I wish my mother were alive to witness this.

I briefly drove to the office to print some documents and talk to Carla and Nadia. One of the difficulties of moving is leaving behind people you have become very fond of. And I have come to like Carla in the two and half years I have worked at UIC. She combines a wry demeanor and an adventurous personal lifestyle—she has been in a polyamorous relationship for years. Staff are not treated well at this institution; her pay is abysmal. But she doesn't let it affect her diligence. We bring each other coffee and laugh a lot, especially at the antics and pretensions of faculty. She is trying not to show it, but she is concerned about my departure. Her only salvation is that she is retiring in December. I have invited her and her husband Steve to be among our first visitors in Los Angeles. After talking about office business, I left, although we talked over the phone a couple of times later in the day. I feel sorry for Nadia, who we just recruited as the academic professional for African American Studies and Gender and Women Studies. I wish I had had a chance to work with her. But she is bright and young so that even in the best of circumstances this can only be a temporary position for her.

From the office I drove by Jewel Osco to buy some supplies. On my way I talked to Mwai whose call I had missed earlier. He is so immensely proud of his father. He said he has posted the LMU announcement on his Facebook page. We have become increasingly close. We talk about all sorts of subjects like a grown son and his father should. I feel very good about this. It's taken a long time, but I am very happy with where our relationship is right now. I am impressed by his determination. He has enrolled in an MBA program and he seems quite clear about his goals. During the recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Malawi, we talked several times a day, sharing our political passions and concerns about our homeland. I feel blessed to have such wonderful children—a fine and industrious son, and an adorable and strong-willed daughter. It is a truly transnational, cosmopolitan, diasporic family—an African-American wife, an African Canadian daughter, a Malawian son and Malawian Canadian father (at least in terms of passport citizenship!). I also talked to Natasha later at the airport. It seems our recent conversations and her ex-

periences and frustrations of not getting a job may have finally convinced her to return to school.

It was unfortunate that Cassandra and I were booked on different flights. It would have been so much more fun being together. At least we did take the same taxi to the airport and we talked several times on the phone once we had gone through security in our different terminals. We agreed she would go straight to the hotel once she arrives in Madrid, for she will get there three hours before me. Being with her in Madrid will be different: it is the first time she has joined me on these research trips.

I was upgraded to Business Class. One has to be grateful for small mercies. I could stretch my legs, get food that was a little more decent as far as airline fare goes, and not have to queue for the toilets for too long or bother or be bothered by someone trying to pass. I settled in to read the magazines and newspapers I had bought. Already I felt the weight of Chicago and the daily grind of UIC lift off my shoulders. I was ready for my new encounters with the African diasporas in Spain, India, the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

May 29, 2009

I am not sure how long I slept during the flight after I was served a rather tasteless dinner of fish. Maybe I should have asked for the beef. If the food was so bad in Business Class, I wonder what they were subjected to in Economy. The young African-American man sitting next to me seemed to have no trouble sleeping. No more than twenty or twenty-one, he was wearing military fatigues. When we first met in the airport lounge he seemed a little nervous. He asked whether he was in the right place, showing me his boarding pass. I beamed and he smiled and went back to his phone. Another young black man herded into America's imperial war machine.

The magazines kept me in good company. *Time* magazine had Michelle Obama on its cover and did a superficial, predictable piece on the meaning of her persona. *Newsweek* featured Iran and its caricatured president. More interesting was *Business Week* with its stories on the economy and new technologies. Disappointing were *Ebony* and *Essence* with thin stories on black celebrities and lifestyle issues interspersed with ads of beautiful people's hair and makeup products. The dearth of serious black magazines, indeed the paucity of black media, including television, is glaring and dispiriting. And to think the African-American community has a purchasing power of nearly \$900 billion, which would make them one of the fifteen richest countries in the world if they were a nation; it borders on the tragic.

The breakfast we were served an hour or so before landing was not much of an improvement over the dinner. Sure, it was healthy: fruits, yogurt, and a croissant and juice and coffee. I would have loved something hot and tasty like eggs and bacon and sausage. Damn, a little indulgence on a long flight is surely deserved.

We arrived at Frankfurt airport right on time, 5:45 a.m. The airport was relatively empty, the lines at customs and baggage claim blissfully short. The thick German customs officer hardly glanced at me when he stamped my passport, although he muttered something that sounded like welcome. The shops were beginning to open. From the newsstands, Michelle Obama's beautiful black face smiled from *Time* while President Ahmadinejad's

bearded, scruffy and darkened face scowled from *Newsweek*. At least that's what I could make out from the dozens of magazines, mostly in German, French, and other inscrutable European languages.

Frankfurt Airport has a clean, cool feel with its marbled floors and crisp steel fixtures, which first struck me years ago but have now been copied with various degrees of success by many airports I have been to around the world. What still makes Frankfurt special are the free newspapers and free coffee and tea stands tucked in various corners. I helped myself to the *International Herald Tribune*, *USA Today*, and *The Financial Times*. Unfortunately, the first two repeated yesterday's U.S. editions of *The New York Times* and *USA Today*.

By the time we began boarding the flight to Madrid after 9:00 a.m., the airport had begun to fill up. We were served an excuse for breakfast on the flight, one more indication that skimpy in-flight meals have gone global! I tried unsuccessfully to sleep. Blessedly, the flight was short. In two hours we landed at Madrid Airport. I was struck by the ordinariness of the airport, at least where we landed. It could have been anywhere in the less developed parts of the world, or in America's numerous regional airports. I spotted a few black people, and other so-called people of color, Asians, Arabs, and some who could be from Latin America.

After picking up my luggage, which now looked bulkier than I had intended, I booked a limo service to the hotel. It came half an hour later with two other couples and what looked like a mother and her teenage daughter. The darkened windows made it hard to enjoy looking outside as we passed office blocks and apartment buildings. The traffic grew heavier as we approached the city, the architecture more interesting and colorfully distinct from the often unimaginative and functional architecture of many of America's lesser cities. We drove along a wide boulevard across from what looked like an endless, beautiful park of sturdy trees, their dense foliage shaking gently in the warm morning sun. Soon we were at the Hotel Ritz Madrid, an imposing, early-twentieth-century ornate building in the heart of Madrid's cultural center. The travel agent who booked the trip was correct: this was an elegant hotel in an exquisite neighborhood with old world charm. It was within walking distance to museums, art galleries, parks, and botanical gardens. The hotel staff exuded the friendliness of a well-appointed hotel.

I found Cassandra in the room. In fact, she opened the door for me and the two bellmen that brought my luggage. She looked happy and excited to see me. After taking a bath, we decided that it would probably be best to walk around to avoid sleeping. She said her leg felt much better, although the shoe made her limp like she was pulling something heavy. In the elevator we bumped into a young Cameroonian woman, who we later found out lived in Dubai and worked for a private jet of a prominent person she couldn't disclose.

Given the state of Cassandra's impaired mobility due to her foot, which she fractured several days ago, we decided not to go too far from the hotel. As it turned out, we stumbled into the hotel gardens where we had a lovely, if overpriced lunch. As usual, we talked about everything from family to friends to colleagues. We had a good laugh thinking about UIC and what Cassandra calls *haters*; all those people who were surprised but none too pleased with my recent hire and our impending move to LMU.

From the gardens we went into the hotel lobby with its exquisite furnishings and ambience. From 4:00–6:00 p.m. they serve afternoon tea and we happily ordered some, remembering how far both of us had travelled to get to this point in our lives as

Afropolitans, as some call cosmopolitans of African descent. The young Cameroonian woman, Linda Alange Abety, found us there. She was with a friend who sat at another table. She excitedly told us about the wedding dress she had just bought at a huge discount—from about €3,000 to €900. She is getting married in January to a Cameroonian man she met in Dubai. Their wedding will be held in her hometown of Bamenda. She gave us her contacts in Dubai, which she said had a large African expatriate and immigrant community, both ordinary workers and professionals. She agreed to help find me some contacts when I get there.

By the time we returned to the room it was nearly 7:00 p.m. I was determined to stay up until at least 8:00 p.m. Cassandra seemed less tired. She said she had slept during the flight and took a nap when she came to the hotel. I teased her—she was young and I was old. Watching TV helped a little. It was a struggle. I barely made it to 8:00.

May 30, 2009

We were both up by 2:00 a.m. It proved hard to go back to sleep. I resigned myself to answering e-mail on my Blackberry. An hour and a half later, I had answered almost 200, mostly the congratulatory messages I received for my LMU appointment.

It must have been around 4:00 a.m. when I went back to sleep. By the time I next opened my eyes, it was nearly 11:00 a.m.! The room was so dark we didn't realize it was that late. I felt refreshed and energetic, ready to see Madrid. After taking our showers and getting dressed we went to the concierge to ask about the city tours. There were two: one, a red double-decker bus that went around historic Madrid, and the other a blue bus that went through modern Madrid. We could purchase the tickets and board the bus just around the corner from the hotel opposite the Museo del Prado. We bought day tickets, which we could use for both tours. We decided to start with the historic tour. We drove along the Calle de Alfonso XII facing the massive Parque del Retiro, through the smart embassy district, past the Biblioteca Nacional and Museo Arqueológico. Instead of a tour guide on the bus, we were given earphones that one could plug in by the seat and listen to the commentary. Along Gran Vía we disembarked to walk around and have some lunch. We saw a delightful café and bar called Zahara across the road. We sat inside the café; the open vista gave us wonderful views of street life and people walking by, a few of whom were black. I ordered chicken and Cassandra ordered a club sandwich. We marveled at how the waiters seemed in no hurry to give us a bill even long after we had finished eating, unlike the fast food joints back in the U.S. where they always seem in a hurry to get you out. And they always seem to have a knack for coming to ask you "how is your food" when you have food in your mouth. Here nobody asked; a relief it was. In the end, we had to call the waiter, an elderly man who seemed harried by the movements back and forth from the kitchen.

We boarded the tour bus where we had disembarked and continued with the tour. We drove past Plaza de España through Templo de Debod, Teatro de la Opera, and disembarked again at the massive Palacio Real, which the recorded tour guide said had 2,800 rooms. Next to the Palace is the Catedral de la Almudena. Both face a beautiful park, Parque del Campo del Moro. By now, we had concluded that Madrid is a beautiful city with charming buildings, elegant parks, and extravagant palaces and monuments. As we walked around the Palace, we couldn't help being appalled at the grandiose wastage of the monarchies

and ostentatious aristocracies. The narrative of the tour of course said nothing about the workers who built these monuments to royal opulence, how ordinary people lived; certainly not how this ill-gotten wealth was looted from the empire. It was all so innocent, so domesticated, so celebratory. The imposing statues of Spanish kings in front of the Palace also presented a sanitized version of Spanish history, one freed from Islamic and Jewish influences, one cleansed of its Andalusian past. It was Christian Spanish uncontaminated by the Moorish, Muslim, Arab, and African—pick your term—conquest and rule that lasted for centuries from the year 711. There were only two oblique references to this other history that, without paying attention, one could easily miss: first, about Moorish quarters and second, the fact that Madrid was founded in 711 by the Arabs, the narrator said. That was all.

After we got back on the bus, we drove along Calle de Bailén past the Puerto de Toledo to Calle Mayor, past Plaza Mayor and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza before we got back to where we had boarded the tour bus five hours earlier. It was still sunny and nice outside so we decided to take the blue bus to visit the newer parts of Madrid. The tours stopped at 9:00 p.m. so this would give us at least three hours. But after waiting for nearly half an hour for the bus, we gave up, went back to the hotel, and ordered a late afternoon tea in the hotel lounge whose opulence became even more striking. There was a wedding party of elegantly dressed men and women. We only saw a handful of children. We remarked how this seemed to be a meeting place for the moneyed elites; each time we sat in the lounge, we saw old women—mostly in their 60s and 70s who walked, dressed, and smelled of serious money.

Cassandra and I parted for a while as she went outside and I returned to the room. By the time we reconnected, we were both ready for dinner. We sat in the restaurant in the garden, which looked even more elegant in the cool evening air with the round lights that flickered like candles appropriately interspersed among the tables with white wicker chairs and blue cushions underneath rectangular umbrellas. It felt romantic. The price for the meals and Cassandra's wine were outrageous, however. We decided to lower our tastes for tomorrow. But in the meantime, we fully enjoyed ourselves.

By the time we returned to the room it was nearly 11:00 p.m. It felt like we had broken our jet lag. We even tried to watch news, BBC, then CNN, but nothing momentous seemed to have happened and so we called it a day.

May 31, 2009

I was wrong, the jet lag returned with a vengeance. I was up around 3:00 a.m. and failed to go back to sleep. Cassandra was a lot luckier, for she was able to do so after a few moments of commiserating with me. After tossing and turning for what appeared an eternity, I decided to go online and check and write e-mails and read newspapers. Sometimes we don't thank our friends enough, I reflected as I wrote the messages. I also sent a form thank-you note to new congratulatory messages on my LMU appointment. I went through my usual retinue of online papers, beginning with *Nyasa Times*, which had reproduced the LMU story. Later in the day, I learned that Jessie Kabwila had sent it to them. The story was followed by several complimentary commentaries.

I woke Cassandra up just before 10:00 a.m. for breakfast. It felt more like a brunch, a sumptuous buffet of cereals, fruits, cold meats, and fish, including my favorite, smoked salmon, and hot offerings of bacon, sausages, scrambled eggs, vegetables and potato

patties, as well as breads, muffins, and croissants. It felt like we were back in South Africa and Malawi last December and January. Cassandra was in an ebullient mood. She talked about her plans for the future, her research and publications and promotion to full professor, how she felt rejuvenated, energized by the appointment at LMU. It was great seeing her so lively, so optimistic, so happy about the move. I know she didn't care too much for being in two different departments at Penn State and UIC.

By the time we finished breakfast I was feeling sleepy, a feeling that stayed with me for parts of the day, even after I had taken a two-hour nap as Cassandra checked her e-mail on my laptop. We spent much of the afternoon at the Museo Nacional del Prado. We visited the permanent exhibition of this massive and impressive museum. It contains paintings from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, mostly Spanish with a sprinkling of other European painters—French, Flemish, Italian, British, and Dutch. Among the major artists whose paintings are featured are El Greco, Tiziano, Tintoretto, Poussin, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Rubens, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo, Goya, Mengs, Tiepolo, Gainsborough, Reynolds, and La Tour. If I were to summarize the overwhelming impression I got from the exhibition, it was their luminous, often brooding preoccupation with religion and violence. The Christian paintings reproduced biblical stories and were particularly fixated on the crucifixion of Jesus, themes that were rendered in both highly stylized and realistic imagery. The others focused on war and violence, either in celebration of its heroism or condemnation of the gratuitousness and futility of murderous conflicts as evident in some of Goya's brooding masterpieces. His black paintings were more troubling in their evocation of black savagery and cannibalism. And there were the self-portraits by some of the artists and the grand, strutting portraits of various monarchs and aristocrats in all their finery and extravagant regalia and squinting pomp and arrogance. None of the painters, as far as I could tell, were women or featured women as centers of attention, except for a few royals. This was a monument to the male artistic imagination of Spanish and European Christianity, war, and power. By the end of the two hours, I had my fill of art for one afternoon.

We returned to the hotel for our ritual afternoon tea. The battle against sleep resumed. We decided to take a walk. It turned out to be an inspired idea. It was a lovely, sunny afternoon; the temperature could not have been more perfect. Everything looked cheerful, including the crowds walking to the various museums and parks and open-air markets. Occasionally we would spot black people. We walked around numerous open-air cafes where prices looked more like this side of eternity compared to the absurd charges at the hotel. We went by an open-air bazaar next to the botanical gardens. Most were amateur paintings of nearby buildings and streets and monuments.

On our way back we decided to stop by a café for drinks and dinner. We sat outside, which took enormous courage on Cassandra's part as she has a morbid fear of pigeons, and pigeons were everywhere. I called Moza, whom I had talked to earlier and had promised to call back. He always sounds so happy these days. He commended me on the story I had written on the Malawian elections, which was posted on my website, and which he said was attracting a lot of positive commentary in the country. His former boss at the bank, the Governor, apparently called it brilliant. I told Cassandra it felt good to be appreciated back home—even cosmopolitans, or Afropolitans, have national political attachments! He reminded us today was his daughter's birthday. We called and wished Angela a happy birthday. And I texted Natasha and we exchanged banter about her most recent date.

By the time we got back to the hotel it was nearly 9:00 p.m. I no longer felt sleepy. And I no longer had any illusions about the twisted effects of jet lag on my sleeping habits.

June 1, 2009

I had agreed to meet Antumi Toasijé, a leading Afro-Spanish intellectual and activist, at 11:00 a.m. at the offices of the Pan-African organization he founded and leads, the Panafrican Center Kituo cha Wanafrika. Like yesterday, I woke up in the middle of the night around 3:00 a.m. and only with the greatest of difficulty was I able to get back to sleep; to wake up around 9:00 a.m., groggy and feeling rather tired. If I were to do this again, I would give myself a week to adjust!

The Panafrican Center was not too far from the hotel, although I only discovered that on my way back. I took a taxi to the Center, arriving half an hour before the appointment. The Center is located in what looks like a residential neighborhood of dense three- to four-floor apartments and small shops and businesses crisscrossed by narrow roads. At a corner store there was a group of African men gathered. In fact, I saw quite a few Africans, mostly men, walking in the neighborhood. Its narrow streets reminded me of Mombasa, while its hilly incline reminded me of parts of Pelourinho in Salvador, Bahia. Unlike these two, however, it was immaculately clean, as is much of the city that I have visited thus far.

I called Antumi, who responded that he was five minutes away. Before long, he pulled up in a black SUV and greeted me warmly, saying he would join me shortly after parking the car. A tall, handsome mixed-race man with speckled gray hair in his well-kept afro, he greeted me heartily in Kiswahili, "Hujambo," he said. He wore a nice and colorful kitenge shirt. He opened the office of the Center, a rather small room, much smaller than my study. "This is all we have," he apologized, but quickly added with pride, "We are one of the few black Spanish organizations with a permanent office space." There was a large bookshelf holding perhaps a couple hundred books, two small desks, and several chairs. The walls were lined with pictures of Pan-African icons and heroes, one of Nkrumah and Du Bois, another of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. The pairings were deliberate, he said, to show and capture Pan-African unity. There were also colorful portraits of prominent black Spaniards, such as Juan Latino, who was a Latinist, poet, and educator at Granada University in the sixteenth century, Juan de Pareja, a painter, and Teresa Chikaba, a nun who was the first known black woman to publish in a European language in 1752 long before Phillis Wheatley from the U.S.

I began by thanking him for agreeing to meet with me at relatively short notice, given how busy he was. He was very delighted to see me, he said, which became clear as we talked. He clearly relished recounting his country's black history to an eager African researcher from the United States. He began by giving me a broad account of the size and composition of the African Spanish population, followed by a fascinating account of its history, internal relationships and organizations, and contemporary scholarship, discourses, and researchers on the subject.

There is no official census of the black Spanish population in Spain. Like France, Spain does not keep such statistics, part of the Jacobin legacy and national mythology of racial harmony and inclusivity. According to his estimate, the black population numbers 950,000–1,000,000 people. This number excludes the approximately 600,000 people of Moroccan descent. Throughout the conversation he excluded the Moroccans from his account of black Spanish, except when it came to a discussion of the history of Africans in Spain in ancient times. This bifurcation of black and African and conflation of African and black is quite common in much of the literature on modern African diasporas in the Atlantic world, a tribute to the inordinate power of the U.S. African diaspora studies

paradigm. In Spain, as in much of continental Europe, it also reflects the racialization of Africa as black, as sub-Saharan, as well as the different self-identifications of the two African populations in which the sub-Saharans see themselves as quintessentially African and the North Africans as Arabs.

Among the black Spaniards, as Antumi defined them, 400,000 are African born. I was intrigued when he said this was according to official figures, which I presumed referred to immigration data. This population is predominantly from West Africa; very few are from East Africa and other parts of the continent. West African immigrants can be subdivided into two, those from Spain's African colonies, principally Equatorial Guinea, and others from the rest of West Africa, mainly Senegal, Nigeria, and Gambia. Another 400,000 are from Latin America, mostly Colombia and Ecuador, with additional immigrants from Cuba, Peru, and Central America. Few are from Brazil. The remaining 150,000 comprise black people from other European countries such as France and Britain, children of African migrants whose numbers he estimated at 50,000, and the old Spanish black populations descended from the Moors and enslaved Africans from the Andalusian and Atlantic slave trade periods.

Spain, he argued, is the most African of European countries based on its location and history. The proto-Iberians originated and migrated from southern Algeria and mixed with the Celts from northern Europe to create the mixed Celt-Iberian population of Spain. The infusion of African populations and the remixing of the Spanish population continued in subsequent historical periods. During the epic struggle between Carthage and Rome over control of the Mediterranean, at least 200,000 blacks entered Spain; one third of the Carthaginian army was black. During the Roman era, another 50,000 blacks entered the country. During the period of the dominance of the Vandals and Visigoths who ruled Spain from North Africa, African influences on Spanish culture and society remained, indeed gained greater importance. From the fourth through eighth centuries when the Visigoths ruled Iberia, there were only 100,000 blacks out of a population of 8 million. Then there were the invasions and conquests of Iberia by the Northwest Africans in the year 711 who were to rule parts of Iberia for the next seven centuries. In contemporary Spanish historiography, this is represented as the Arab invasions, while the older historiography talked of the Moors. The invaders were a mixed-race people, 70% were black, certainly darker than many contemporary Moroccans, Antumi insisted. The erasure of the Moors in favor of the Arabs is part of the official discourse that seeks to de-Africanize and Europeanize Spain. Blacks in Spanish history are represented solely in terms of slavery, as an enslaved people who entered Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Forgotten in all this, of course, is the profound influence of the Moors on Spanish history and the fact that slavery in Spain involved both whites and blacks.

The *Reconquista*, in which the Arabs and Moors were expelled, is often presented as the restoration of true Spanish history—Spain as a Christian nation. However, large numbers of Moors remained, although their leaders were expelled in the course of the sixteenth century. Genetic studies clearly show the heavy African imprint on the Spanish population. This is even much more so in Portugal. The seventeenth century is often regarded in official historiography as the Golden Age, characterized by the establishment of the Spanish empire in the Americas. But even during this period in Spanish regions and cities with large black populations such as Seville and Valencia, only a third of this population was enslaved. The rest were free and included highly influential black artists and intellectuals such as Juan Latino, Juan de Pareja, and Chikaba. They were particularly visible in music and influenced the development of Flamenco. In Seville, they had their

own quarter. By the nineteenth century, the black population had become less visible because of massive migrations and conflicts.

In the history of twentieth-century Spain, the Civil War is a pivotal event. The Franco dictatorship exhibited a contradictory relationship to blacks and Spain's identity. Franco was a fascist but not a racist, Antumi claimed. He publicly acknowledged and recognized that the Spanish were a mixed people. His experiences in Morocco, and the fact that his personal military guard was made up of Moroccans, partly explain his acceptance of blacks, some of whom rose to prominent positions in state institutions during his tenures from parliament to the police. Today there are no black parliamentarians. While Franco vigorously pushed Spain's Catholic identity, this was not based on, or accompanied by the dis-Africanization of Spain. Indeed, this was the period when Spain was regarded as not fully European, a representation captured in the aphorism, "Africa begins at the Pyrenees," a sentiment that also recognized the relative isolation of fascist Spain in post-war democratic western Europe.

Democratization and integration of Spain into Europe—the European Community and later European Union—had the ironic effect, as far as Spain's identity and African heritage were concerned, of de-Africanization and Europeanization. A powerful official discourse emerged which was reproduced in the educational and popular media, from school textbooks to anti-immigrant legislation, which erased the African presence in Spanish history and depicted Africans as dangerous illegal aliens, blacks as an inferior race of people. Negative images of blacks often reproduced American images, which also had the effect of presenting racism as an American problem alien to the Spanish experience. The exclusion of blacks from the national polity, from citizenship, dates as far back as the first Republican constitution of 1812. The immigration laws of the recent democratic period built on and extended this racist legacy.

It is in this context that a lot of African organizations in Spain emerged over the last twenty years. They are national, ethnic, and religious; the largest being those representing Senegalese and Nigerian immigrants. Currently, there are four or five Pan-African organizations. They include the Pan-African Federation, the Black Panther Association, the High Council of Black Communities in Spain, the Pan-African Movement in Barcelona, the Black Panther Party, and his own Center. He described the different ideological orientations of these movements. He criticized the Pan-African Federation for the problematic personality of its president and authoritarian and conservative tendencies. The Black Panther Party follows and supports leftist syndicates, while the Barcelona movement espouses the ideology of the black liberation army and Assata Shakur. His own center is independent, but leftist. The various organizations also differ in their Pan-Africanist orientations and linkages. The Pan-African Federation, for example, seeks to pursue the goals of classical Pan-Africanism and the *uhuru* movement and they participated in the Million Man March in the U.S., while the Black Panthers advocate the ideology of the U.S. Black Panthers. His own organization believes in both classical Pan-Africanist ideals and the Afrocentric philosophy advanced by Molefi Asante. An important milestone in the history of the Pan-Africanist movement in Spain was the convening of the 2005 Pan-African Congress, which was attended by more than 200 people from Spain and abroad, including Asante. Antumi showed me dozens of pictures from the Congress as well as of historic communities of black Spaniards from Seville.

Antumi's Center was first created in 2003 as the African Studies and Pan-Africanist organization before it changed to its current name in 2005, thanks to the influence of Afrocentricism that he and his colleague had become aware of. The Center created a

review called *Nsibidi*, which had 20,000 readers each month, but due to publication costs and lack of resources it was difficult to sustain. The Center focuses on three main lines of work. First, it provides information on Pan-Africanism and organizes campaigns against racism. He called this its informative work. Second, it provides education including online courses on Pan-African culture and history. He called this its formative work. Finally, it assists people in need of lawyers to fight against racism, or families dealing with domestic problems.

He observed that the internal problems and conflicts within the Pan-African movement are also reflected in relations among the different African groups. Moroccans don't generally see themselves as Africans with a common identity and cause with the other Africans, with the exception of the more educated ones among them. There have in fact been clashes—at least three in recent years—between sub-Saharan Africans and Moroccans. When Moroccans experience racism they begin to think of themselves as immigrants; the immigrant identity trumps their African identity. Thus, discourses of Pan-Africanism are limited to a minority of blacks and Moroccans who consider each other the same people. Overall, the Moroccans tend to be better organized than the other Africans.

Similar divisions and complexities can be observed among the African diasporan groups from the Americas. The Colombians are more organized and Pan-Africanist than the Dominicans, which he attributed to greater racial consciousness and struggle in Colombia than in the Dominican Republic. The Colombians tend to enjoy closer relations with the Africans as a result.

Among the Africans from West Africa there are divisions between those from Equatorial Guinea, who, as members of a former Spanish colony, speak Spanish and feel closer affinity to Spain than immigrants from the other countries. While Africans in general are invisible and, except for culture, not very involved in national life, including politics and the economy, those from Equatorial Guinea tend to be more influential and professionally involved than the other Africans. Consequently, they prefer not to mix with the other Africans. The African population in Spain tends to be weakened also by its relatively small size and geographic dispersion.

Besides the influence and presence of diasporan Africans from Latin America, he noted that the influence of African Americans had begun to grow in the 1950s as some writers and artists visited or relocated from the U.S. I asked him about the impact of the Obama election and presidency. He personally thought it was too soon to tell what its impact might be. People throughout Spain were generally happy about his election, and many blacks were ecstatic. He too was happy but realistic; he did not expect much profound change or commitment to transformation in U.S. race relations or foreign policies. The Black Panthers were already very critical of Obama; they fear that his presidency threatens to bring to an end the black liberation struggle. He didn't share that view.

We ended the two-hour conversation with him giving me a list of prominent scholars and writers that he believes I would enjoy talking to. Among them were poet and professor at the University of Salamanca, Dr. Justo Bolekia Boleká, and Professor Mbuyi Kabunda of the Autonomous University of Madrid who spends time between Madrid and Switzerland, and Katalina Mukwe, a young female writer who also leads a political party of immigrants.

By the time we finished, he looked so animated that had I asked him or had he more time he would have gone on educating me about African Spanish history, politics, and culture. He walked me out to the Metro station where we ran into the president of the Pan-African Federation, a short, balding, pleasant black man who promptly invited me

to do a television interview and gave me a flyer for the Africa Day celebration. Unfortunately, the event would be celebrated on May 23! When I told Antumi where exactly I was going, he said it was close by so that I didn't need to take the Metro or a taxi. We shook hands vigorously; both of us quite pleased with the meeting. We promised to keep in touch.

It was indeed not too far from the hotel. It took me less than twenty minutes. When I got to the room, Cassandra was not in. I was about to go look for her in the lobby when she came in. We decided to spend the rest of the afternoon at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. We enjoyed the walk and loved the museum. Along the way, we came across several Senegalese, or who we assumed were Senegalese vendors, selling the usual ware of sunglasses, watches, handbags, belts, and films, some of which looked like Nollywood productions.

The museum is an imposing structure of four stories, the massive concrete walls broken and livened by glass elevators and walkways painted white leading to more walls. In the middle of the rectangular building is a garden of trees, shrubs, walkways, and gazebos. The corridors facing the garden are open which gives the museum an open, welcoming environment and feel. We started on the second floor which holds the permanent exhibitions, among them the works of Salvador Dali, including his cluttered, cubist self-portrait; those of Daniel Vázquez Díaz and Joan Miró; Juan Gris' finely executed objects of everyday life—musician's table, carafe and book, coffee, guitar, and newspapers, and open window; Oskar Schlemmer's dancers and sculptures; photos and posters of the Spanish civil war by Robert Capa, Juan Pando and Alfonso Sánchez Portela. The highlight was, of course, the old master himself, Pablo Picasso. We started with his sketches and preparations for his masterpiece, *Guernica*, which fill two rooms. *Guernica* stands in all of its awe-inspiring majesty in its own room, a massive intricate painting of intoxicating visual power. We all stood in awed silence, overwhelmed by the presence in front of us—of one of the great paintings of the twentieth century and its legendary reputation.

After *Guernica*, everything was somewhat of a letdown. We went to the fourth floor to look at the exhibitions of several contemporary artists, including Paul Sietsema's film, *Figure 3*, Peter Fischli & David Weiss' *Are Animals People* and a retrospective of Juan Muñoz. They were a disappointment, almost banal compared to the great, adventurous art of Picasso and his contemporaries, and even the art of the old masters we saw yesterday at the Prado.

By the time we returned to the hotel I was feeling exhausted. We took our customary tea and rested in the lounge for a little over an hour before venturing out for dinner. We found a lovely restaurant across the street facing the water fountain. It was pleasant sitting in the covered café adjacent to the main restaurants, but that was all: the cod in olive oil soup I ordered was enough for a couple of bites. Cassandra was lucky with her oxtail stew, which proved more filling. We decided to walk back to the café where we ate yesterday, La Plateria Bar Museo. I ordered Spanish pork. It was delicious. Cassandra could barely contain herself with laughter as she sipped her beer. We were even served by the same woman who served us yesterday, a tall, stern-looking but friendly woman who could pass for a man. She spoke English with a Spanish accent. The young woman who took the initial order was black. I was dying to speak to her but she spoke no English and of course, I spoke no Spanish, so we just grinned at each other in our mutual incomprehension.

Upon returning from the café we found a message on the hotel phone. Kamari Clarke from Yale had called. She said she would try again. Cassandra wondered whether I had informed her I had accepted the LMU job and there was now no prospect of pursuing

anything with Yale. I had chosen the path at the fork in my career road: it was now towards administration.

We hadn't seen the news all day. It was tragic to hear of the French Airways jet that had disappeared in the Atlantic. We of course thought of our own travels. A rather sad end to what had been a most provocative and pleasant day despite the lack of adequate sleep.

June 2, 2009

It has become a terrible routine, waking up in the middle of the night and having great difficulty getting back to sleep. Maybe old age is finally beginning to catch up with me. After a late breakfast, I came back to the room and took a rather fitful nap. Cassandra amused herself reading magazines in the park. She seemed to be having a great time and she naturally loves the outdoors, except where there are pigeons, of course!

I had arranged a meeting with Juan Aranzadi at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, an open university with more than 200,000 students, I later learned. He is an anthropologist who works on Equatorial Guinea. The concierge at the hotel told me I would need a taxi to go there. The taxi driver got lost and was honest about it by stopping the meter from running until he located the side street leading to the university.

The receptionist pointed me to the third floor where the Department of Anthropology was located. But it turned out Juan's office was on the first floor. I was led there by a woman who spoke impeccable English with an American accent. Juan informed me she was actually from Chicago but lived in Spain with her husband. When she called him, she thought I was a student. Typically American, I thought.

Juan looked quite pleased to see me. A man of average height and a scruffy face, he had invited one of his colleagues, the much older professor Ubaldo Martinez Veiga, also an anthropologist, who has just completed a project on recent African immigrants, specifically the infamous boat people who have become symbols of poor Africans' desperation to flee their countries and get into Europe at all costs. The two of them took turns telling me about their research and elaborating on each other's points and observations.

Part of the conversation focused on the state of African studies in Spain. Juan began by noting that there are few Africanists in Spain. The situation, in his view, is quite dismal and the quality of the work tends to be poor and scanty. He is among the few who have tried to systematically study African societies, in his case Equatorial Guinea, which was previously the province of missionary interest and studies, most of them of poor quality. For his part, Ubaldo is one of a few who have studied African migration to Spain. Toward the end of our conversation, we returned to the subject of African studies and African diaspora studies in the country. Juan suggested that African studies in Spain was not well developed because anthropology was developed quite late, indeed is still relatively underdeveloped compared to other parts of western Europe. Ubaldo added that the human sciences were generally underdeveloped because of the legacies of the Franco dictatorship. Much of Spanish anthropology is an exercise in navel gazing in that scholars tend to be preoccupied with their national groups or regions—Basque country, Catalonia, Andalusia, and so on and are far less interested in the exotic gaze of ethnic groups and cultures in other parts of the world such as Africa. Historically, there has been some interest in African studies in Barcelona, but very little in Madrid. The lack of interest in African studies in

the Spanish academy extends to Equatorial Guinea. When he started working on the country ten to twenty years ago, Juan found few people interested in his work. Recently, American involvement in Equatorial Guinea, driven by its interest in oil, has provoked some interest on the part of Spanish scholars and commentators. Not surprisingly, there is little knowledge in Spain of African-American studies and African diaspora studies in general. African-American icons such as Douglas and Du Bois are hardly known. Juan gave the example of his wife who translated Olaudah Equiano's book into Spanish, but the book only sold a few miserable copies.

When I probed a little further it became clear that they were talking about *black* or Sub-Saharan Africa. They acknowledge that there are lots of studies on the Maghreb, mostly on language and philosophy and far fewer on anthropology. The latter mostly consist of studies of rural communities and the role of modernizing institutions such as the army. As for the historical studies, there was a body of literature on slavery in Spain. How about studies of Andalusians, Moorish Spain, I pushed. This, they both agreed, is a vast field of scholarship, foundational in fact, to discourses of Spanish identity. How this period is interpreted is central to how you define Spanish identity. There have been intense debates in Spanish historiography on the nature of the Moorish invasion—whether it was an invasion or not, the cultural influences and legacies of this period, the extent to which the Spanish people and Spanish culture represent population and intercultural mixtures. Among the scholars who have been trying to recover the Moorish, as well as the Jewish roots of Spain, is Juan Goytisolo, the Spanish writer who relocated to Marrakech in Morocco in 1997. Some have even shown the debt the works of Cervantes owes to these suppressed influences and legacies. I asked them if they could refer me to some historiographical surveys that summarize these debates. Ubaldo noted that an unfortunate tendency has developed in the scholarship on this period in which Arabic and Islamic studies are separated from each other. I wish I had probed him a little more, for on the surface, and certainly for Africa diaspora studies, such a separation may not be such a bad thing insofar as African Muslims, including Berbers and West Africans, who constituted the majority of the conquering forces are assumed to have been Arab.

Juan discussed his research on a religious movement in Equatorial Guinea, which shares some analogies with Voodoo and Bakuba. I was intrigued to learn that he was initiated into the religion, but he did not elaborate and I didn't probe further. He noted that this work was influenced by French anthropologists from Balandier to Meillassoux to Copans, but this was more on his own initiative rather than a part of organized schools of thought. Working on Equatorial Guinea, itself isolated in Africa, in Spain where African studies is underdeveloped, is very isolating. His dream is to organize a conference in Equatorial Guinea with local and other African scholars. He asked if I could link him to scholars in the region and even across the continent. I mentioned CODESRIA.

I was far more interested in learning about Ubaldo's research on African migrations to Spain. Perhaps not wishing to be upstaged, Juan talked about the migrations from Equatorial Guinea which were rooted in the dictatorship of Macías Nguema which killed a lot of people and forced as much as a third of the country's population to migrate to neighboring countries and Spain. Ubaldo chipped in that the establishment of the Nguema dictatorship, which co-existed with the Franco dictatorship, was ironically facilitated by the advice of a socialist opponent of Franco. Like the French colonies, Spain thought Equatorial Guinea would be Spanish forever. At the time of independence, many of the *emancipados*, who had come to study in Spain or who had studied in Spain but returned to Equatorial Guinea, relocated to Spain to escape the growing dictatorship. The dictatorship

in Equatorial Guinea continued after Nguema was ousted by his nephew, which sustained Guinean migration flows to Spain. As a former colony, it was easier for Equatorial Guineans to migrate than other Africans, both legally and illegally by purchasing illegal documents including passports. This created a sense of separateness for the Guineans among Africans in Spain. However, amongst themselves, Juan asserted, they did not organize as Guineans but as members of specific ethnic groups, such as Fang, etc.

Ubaldo's account of his research was quite gripping. He began his research on the boat people coming from Africa last year. He has interviewed about 100 for a book he has just completed and expects to be published soon. He interviewed most of them at a church where they were given shelter, subsistence and legal assistance by a sympathetic priest. Many of the migrants take three to six years to come to Spain—one even took ten years—from the time they left their countries of origin. Many are from peasant and desperately poor backgrounds. They first go to Algeria where they work as masons, cooks, and at other menial jobs. It is while in Algeria that they begin to realize, for the first time, that they are black. This racial consciousness emerges from the way the Algerians behave towards them and the way they are treated. After accumulating some money and resources, they cross into Morocco where they may or may not work. They seek fishermen and boat owners to arrange for the dangerous journey across the straits into Spain. Their documents are often confiscated by the boat owners. When they arrive in Spain, they are usually arrested and placed into internment centers, which are really concentration camps, Spain's little Guantanamo, Ubaldo called them with ill-disguised disgust. After 40 days or so, they are released and they often gravitate to refugee centers and NGOs. The NGOs have grown rich on the backs of these refugees, he maintained. They receive funds to teach them Spanish and help them resettle, but all too often they are provided assistance for a few months—often no more than three—before being dumped into the labor market where they are subject to gross forms of exploitation and abuse. They take on very low paying and dangerous work in construction and road building. He mentioned the construction of an underground tunnel in Madrid that relied on the labor of African refugees and illegal immigrants. Following the emergence of the economic crisis, even this work has dried up so that most are now unemployed. Of those he interviewed, only 25% found jobs as night watchmen for buildings under construction. This work is outsourced to them by gypsies, themselves an exploited minority, who exploit poor Africans. Many are not even paid by the gypsies who claim they are already doing them a favor by giving them shelter and saving them from the police. The gypsy night guards are normally paid €1,900 per month, but they pay the African immigrants they sub-contract €2–3 a day and subject them to ill-treatment and insults. The conditions for these Africans are truly horrible. He recounted the story of a young man he had interviewed who, in a week, had only eaten an apple. He took him to a café. But how often and how many can one researcher help, he asked with anguish, his arms flailing in the air. When he was doing these interviews the stories were so heart wrenching that he found it hard to sleep.

The stories of these migrants, he argued, debunk some popular myths and generalizations in the migration literature. One is return theory, that migrants are enmeshed in social networks that facilitate their migration and resettlement. The overwhelming reality and sense of the people he interviewed was their utter loneliness. Their situation also deconstructs analytical preoccupations with identity; they express no interest in ethnic identity and solidarity. For many of them, the possibilities of returning home or maintaining linkages with families and communities back home are unlikely. Even those doing better than the boat people, some who were doing well before they came to Spain, are reluctant

to return home until they become rich. Juan intervened with the latter point and stressed that you can't speak of one African diaspora in Spain, for there are many different diasporas in terms of their class positions, ethnic and national origins, not to mention gender. Women sometimes wish to stay in Spain either to have or raise Spanish-born children.

The condition of the boat people also shines a bright light on the complex dynamics of racialization, racism, and Spain's Europeanization, Ubaldo resumed. Spain and other EU countries seek to use Morocco and other North African countries to stem migration flows from Africa. In exchange for development aid, they encourage them to construct draconian influx control measures, which have resulted in the wanton abuse of African migrants by the police; in some cases they have been rounded up and sent to the desert to die. Ideologically, Spain, France, and other EU countries use the notion of the Mediterranean Zone and solidarity to draw the North African states as satellites of Europe's fortress, with the enticement that one day they might be allowed in, to become Europeanized. For their part, a Mediterranean identity is attractive to the North Africans as a substitute for the negative associations of an African identity. To African scholars in Spain—he mentioned a Nigerian—it is clear the Moroccans, who he claimed number a million, prefer to call themselves Mediterranean because they don't want to be African. But it was also quite clear among the boat people he interviewed that the Algerians and Moroccans consider themselves white.

But the Spanish do not see them as white. In fact, the North Africans are more hated and feared than the sub-Saharan Africans. The latter are often subjected more to what can be called paternalistic racism. Ubaldo mentioned a book he is working on focusing on different racisms in Spain. He identified four: the hatred against Muslims, among whom North Africans are collectively lumped; contempt for black Africans; prejudice against Latinos who are dismissed as honorary whites; and the age-old dislike of gypsies. The situation is of course complicated when it comes to blacks who are Muslim and Latinos who are black. The fear of Muslims is deeply rooted in historical memories and anxieties of being invaded.

Given the complex dynamics of migration patterns, the diversity of the African diaspora population, and Spanish racism, it is not surprising that the African diasporas do not share a common identity and are not united. He estimated the poor black Africans number as many as 147,000, while the Moroccans may be up to a million. He claimed blacks from Africa and Latin America in Spain do not mix.

Ubaldo ended his animated presentation with an intriguing fixation on Mami Wata, who can be considered the goddess of migration, a Pan-African goddess; a devotion which he says he found common among the boat people, and is indeed pervasive all over coastal Africa and the coastal diaspora worlds. His interest in the subject was triggered by his interviewees who made constant references to Mami Wata, how they would throw rice to propitiate her, how they imagined the worlds she created and controlled under the sea, how she sustained them during their uncertain voyages. The earliest reference to Mami Wata goes as far back as the 1680s in Suriname. As he talked, the anthropologist took over and I became more mystified but fascinated all the same.

All along there was an older woman who was working on a computer but never joined our conversation. As we prepared to leave, almost two hours later, I was introduced to her as Ubaldo's wife, a geneticist. They both got their PhDs at Columbia University and frequently go to the U.S. In fact, Ubaldo taught at Johns Hopkins in sociology and Ingrid, his wife, still works with colleagues there. Their daughter lives in Philadelphia. They

offered to give me a ride to near where I was going. We dropped Juan off at a Metro station and proceeded to the Palace, which as it turned out, Cassandra and I had visited on our tour of old Madrid. There was a concert tonight, which they planned to attend. They were a fascinating couple. She badgered him about his driving and he shrugged his shoulders, saying she likes to keep him in check, but added for good measure that he was not driving his car. After parking the car in an underground parking lot near the Palace, they invited me for a drink. Ingrid and I ordered coffee and Ubaldo ordered a beer and I heard more about their histories. In her youth, Ingrid traveled a lot because her father worked for the World Health Organization. They invited me to contact them next time I visited Madrid and I reciprocated the invitation for when they visit the U.S.

I followed the map Ingrid had sketched for me. From Palacio Real and Plaza de Oriente, I walked through Calle Mayor to Sol then to Carrera de San Jeronimo to Paseo del Prado. It was a truly lovely walk in a beautiful neighborhood of plazas, promenades, shops, restaurants, apartments, and offices. It was so clean and inviting. What a fine city this is, so apparently livable, so pleasant, even charming.

Cassandra said she had had a great day as well. She looked so relaxed and happy, notwithstanding her ankle. After resting for a while we decided to find a new restaurant. We walked deeper into one of the neighborhoods nearby and found a wonderful little place with a rustic homeliness. It was packed. And the food was wonderful and filling, which was a relief considering our dinner yesterday. In fact, we ordered a little too much: fried calamari, stewed octopus and oxtail. Cassandra ordered a glass of wine, or rather, wine served in a bowl, to her amused delight. It was a perfect place to have our last supper in Madrid. The fact that we were served by a black woman and a Chinese woman added to the sense of belonging and enjoyment. And walking back, we explored more of the neighborhood and saw yet more restaurants and bars, all filled up. It was around 10:00 p.m. We sauntered back to the hotel captivated by the ambience of the cool night along the narrow streets pulsating with life. Getting back to the room and packing, I thought this would be a good place to return for a real holiday.

Germany

June 3, 2009

Another restless night made worse by the fact that I had to wake up at 5:00 a.m. to leave for the airport in time for the 7:40 a.m. flight. After a quick shower and dressing, I kissed Cassandra goodbye. She was wide awake and cheerful, obviously happy with the trip and our time together. She looked quite rested.

As I was being driven to the airport I felt regret at leaving Cassandra as well as the shortness of the visit. I wished I had spent more than two days doing interviews. The three people I had talked to, especially Antumi, had suggested so many other potential interviewees. It was clear I had only begun to scratch the surface of Spain's complex and infinitely fascinating history of its connections to Africa and its African diaspora.

To my surprise at the check-in desk at the airport, I discovered that I was booked in Business Class. That meant that I could go to the business lounge, but it offered little beyond what one could get in the ordinary lounge. Or maybe it was my usual morning grumpiness worsened by days of inadequate sleep and my two regrets. The hot breakfast on the plane and free magazines were certainly welcome. I took the latest copy of *The Economist*, which I ended up not reading, for I dozed off after the breakfast.

Munich Airport was as pleasant as Frankfurt, essentially for the same reasons—free newspapers! I helped myself to the same three papers—*The New York Times*, *The Financial Times*, and *USA Today*. I was happily buried in one of the papers when I heard my name. It was Anne Pitcher and her husband Martin Murray. They were off to the conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) in Leipzig. We engaged in the predictable small talk of academics. Thankfully, half an hour later we boarded and I could resume my reading. The Business Class of a shuttle flight is a practical joke, for there is no difference in the size of the seats or length of the legroom. Perhaps it was about the bun they served. In Economy, marked by a short curtain, they only got drinks. Occasionally, I looked out of the window and was struck by how the landscape looked like a well-manicured garden interspersed with islands of red-roofed white houses, thick green patches of trees, meandering roads or rivers and water dams. It was utterly scenic, but a little unsettling too for its ordinariness, plasticity, and dull flatness; there is much to be said for untamed nature and rugged terrain and wild trees.

At the airport in Leipzig, I ran into Anne and Martin again. I wasn't aware she got an offer at the University of Michigan last year and has been negotiating for a spousal hire for Martin, but nothing has worked out yet. They decided to take a train into town, while with my three pieces of luggage I opted for a taxi.

Michaelis Hotel is a small, charming hotel that is impeccably clean with sizeable rooms. But the first room I was given was a smoking room and I asked for a non-smoking room. They initially said all rooms were sold out, but I pleaded asthma and it worked. The newer room is in fact better in other ways: it has a queen bed instead of two twin beds and it faces the road instead of some nondescript building behind the hotel, as the first room did.

After a brief rest I went to the front desk to ask where the organizers of the International African Institute Council were meeting. The meeting was outside the hotel but there was no conference packet. One of the women at the desk tried to recall where they said they were meeting and she drew a map. I should not have bothered. After walking for about an hour I couldn't find the place. My only consolation was that I got to see a part of the city which has an interesting blend of medieval and early-modern architecture, as well as the severe architecture of the Soviet era when this was part of the GDR, and the post-modern steel and glass buildings of more recent years. In fact, there seems to be quite a bit of construction going on.

By early evening, I still had not seen any of the IAI members. While having dinner I finally saw Professor V.Y. Mudimbe and a couple other Africans and several rumpled white men who looked like typical unkempt academics. I had last seen Professor Mudimbe in Nairobi in 2004 at a conference. But by the time I finished eating they were no longer in the lobby. I was about to go to my room when this tall, bald white American asked if I was Professor Zeleza. It turned out he was Philip Burnham, the Director of the IAI, and he was walking to a restaurant where they had arranged to have dinner. I reluctantly agreed to accompany him. Hardly had we stepped out than I regretted it: it was cold and I only had a short-sleeved shirt on. He was sympathetic but neither of us suggested I go back to the hotel. Thinking this was summer and having heard how hot it is in India and the Gulf, I decided not to come with jackets. The suit I had worn from Chicago had gone back with Cassandra to lighten my luggage.

By the time we got to the restaurant I was freezing, although I tried to act and look otherwise. But I told Philip that since I had already eaten, I would only drop by to say hello and return to the hotel. As if he read my mind, he suggested that I take a taxi back, which I did. I only went for five minutes or so and quickly greeted everyone, none of whom I knew or had met in person before, except for Professor Mudimbe. Incidentally, the proceedings from the conference on media and development in Africa had just been published in a book edited by the late John Middleton, who proposed my candidacy for the IAI Council and for presenter of this year's Lugard Lecture. Everyone remarked on my cold hands. The hotel room became even more attractive and I turned down entreaties to stay for a while and have a drink. Suddenly I felt very tired, but I couldn't go to sleep immediately when I got back to the hotel, for I had to work on the Lugard Lecture, which, to my trepidation had been widely advertised as one of the public keynote addresses at the AEGIS Conference. Since the IAI Council meeting was scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m., which I was expected to attend, and the lecture was at 2:30 p.m., I had no choice but to work on the paper, a revised version of the presentation I gave as the ASA Presidential Lecture at Rutgers a couple months ago. I had re-titled it "Pan-Africanism in the Age of Obama." Thanks to computers, it was a pasting job. Ah, the joys and tribulations of an academic life!

June 4, 2009

Finally, I had a full night's sleep, waking up past 8:00 a.m. I went downstairs to print my presentation and have breakfast. Several members of the IA Council were in the restaurant and we left together for the place where they were holding the meeting. It was more than a mile away and there was no way I could have found it by myself.

The meeting lasted from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Professor Mudimbe, the chairman kindly introduced me at the beginning of the meeting. Several of the Council's 21 members were not present including Professor Ajayi, Kelly Askew, George Bond, Ato Quayson, and Madut Jok who will be my colleague at LMU. Those present included Professors Birgit Meyer, Murray Last, Fred Ahwireng-Obeng, Richard Banegas, Flip de Boeck, Peter Geschiere, Odile Goerg, Holger Hansen, Adam Jones, Celestin Monga, and Isak Niehaus. The meeting continued from where they had left off yesterday. Much of the discussion focused on a report by the editor of the IAI's flagship journal, *Africa*, on the journal itself and the publication program in general. Among the issues was the new publishing contract IAI should pursue. The three bidders are Edinburgh University Press, which has been publishing *Africa* and the IAI's monograph series; Cambridge University Press; and the huge commercial publisher Taylor and Francis, which has 1350 scholarly journals under its fold. Stephanie Kitchen, chair of the Publications Committee who had prepared a useful assessment of the three tenders, provided critical guidance. The general feeling was the CUP would be the best option. The Trustees will make the final decision. As we went around, each one of us making our comments and recommendations, I mentioned a similar discussion we had in the ASA with two of the same vendors — CUP and T and F. In the end, we decided to keep our journals in-house for the time being. The next major discussion centered on an update on a heritage conference proposal. The conference will be held in Ghana later this year. This served as the basis of a wider discussion on how the IAI could increase its visibility and work with other African studies organizations outside the continent and African scholars and institutions on the continent. However well-meaning these conversations might be, they always seem to be framed within the help-poor-Africans narrative of the mercy industrial complex.

The two-hour break between the end of the meeting and my presentation of the Lugard Lecture was not long enough to go back to the hotel, so we all walked to the conference venue at Leipzig University, which is celebrating its 600th anniversary this year. The conference is being held in a part of a new, massive building that has yet to be completed. It is a fine, airy, sunny, and open ultra-modern building; on some of the walls are flat-screen monitors displaying events at appropriate locations. The university is massive with 29,000 students. It takes up a good chunk of downtown, which apparently has undergone a lot of renovations since the reunification of the two Germans.

We had lunch in what looked like a fast food restaurant. Several people ordered full meals and beer. I and Obeng ordered salads and water. I realized, to my ultra-embarrassment, that I had forgotten my money in the pants I wore yesterday and I didn't have a credit card on me. On these long overseas trips, I leave my small pocket wallet and bring a larger one that can hold my passport and tickets, which I do not move around with. Obeng kindly came to my rescue. A Ghanaian, he has been working in South Africa since 1983. He started at the then University of Bophuthatswana and is now at Wits. He was friends with Dominic Milanzi, an old sociology lecturer of mine at Chancellor College in the 1970s who died several years ago. We also talked about a mutual friend, Guy Mhone, who was his colleague at Wits who also died recently. And he proudly let me know he is now a grandfather. He has three daughters who have all finished their undergraduate studies. His daughter who lives in London has given him the two grandsons he calls "my boys." His large face grinned with absolute delight when he talked about them. Having lived in South Africa for so long, he was pleased with many of the changes he had witnessed.

But he complained about the poor quality of students and programs at the formerly black universities, now called historically disadvantaged institutions.

The auditorium for the Lugard Lecture was packed to capacity and some people couldn't find seats and stood by the two entrances. Philip Burnham introduced me quite graciously and there was applause as I mounted the dais. I talked for 45–50 minutes and at the end of the lecture Professor J.D.Y. Peel, Chairman of the IAI Board of Trustees, gave a vote of thanks. When I first met him this morning he remarked that I looked much younger than he expected. I said looks could be deceiving, as I always do when I get such comments, which happens frequently. I guess, as they say, *black don't crack!* To my surprise and disappointment, there was no Q&A, which I had expected and lingered on the stage for. Nevertheless, I was mobbed by several people who congratulated me on what many referred to as a brilliant presentation. Carina Ray, a former colleague from Penn State where she did her post-doc before moving to Fordham, had been in the audience but I didn't see her. She e-mailed me to congratulate me and asked if we could meet later in the evening. The Africans in the audience seemed particularly happy with the presentation and performance. Among them were Kenyans, who of course claim Obama as one of their own, and a young Malawian woman whose name I can't recall who is studying for a PhD at a German university. She was ecstatic and seemed pleased and a tad surprised that I still spoke Chichewa so fluently after having been out of the country for more than 30 years. She works for the non-profit sector in Lilongwe and expects her husband to join her later this year to study for a PhD as well.

Outside the auditorium by the corridors where the book exhibit was, I continued to be approached by people who complimented me on the lecture. A young Kenyan man wearing locks took me to task, however, for not giving credit for Obama's rise to the women in his life—his mother, and above all Michelle, and of course his two lovely daughters. I said he had a point, although this was not a lecture on Obama's personal life, rather Pan-Africanism in the age of Obama. The legitimate point he had tried to make was the lack of a gender analysis in my account of the reconstruction of Pan-Africanism in the age of Obama, which I will incorporate in revisions for the paper. Another Kenyan, a white American who has lived in Kenya for nearly 40 years, was keen to show me his knowledge of Kenya. What I found fascinating about him were his connections to the great American labor leader Walter Reuther with whom Tom Mboya used to stay when he visited the U.S. Tom Mboya was of course the architect of the airlift program that brought Kenyan students to the U.S. at the turn of the 1960s, among them was President Obama's father. Walter Reuther was this man's uncle, a fact he doesn't widely advertise in Kenya, he said. But the enthusiasm with which he told his story and the many missed opportunities he had to meet Mboya seemed to indicate otherwise. Years after Mboya had been assassinated—he claimed it happened on his birthday—he did meet Pamela Mboya, the late charismatic politician's wife.

The book exhibit was a far cry from the book exhibits at the ASA conferences. Earlier I had met Justin Cox who was at the ABC table where several of my books were on display including the two volumes of *The Study of Africa* and *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*. We exchanged pleasantries and I asked him how Mary Jay was doing. Talking about ABC, Stephanie Kitchen reminded me as we walked from the IAI Council meeting that we had first met at the ABC warehouse and offices where she used to work years ago in Oxford. I thought she did look familiar when I first saw her last night at the restaurant where the Council members had gone to dinner.

At 5:00 p.m. we all gathered in another building for the official opening of the conference. We were first welcomed by the Rector of the University of Leipzig who recounted his Uni-

versity's history and engagement with African studies, of which it has one of the largest programs in the country with 390 majors and many prominent Africanists. The next was a welcome address by the Saxon State Minister for Higher Education, Research, and the Fine Arts, who was followed by Paul Nugent's witty welcome address on behalf of the AEGIS, although he got it wrong that with its 1,000 participants, this conference was the largest African studies gathering in the world breaking, or at the very least equal to the ASA's annual meeting. The keynote address was presented by the Secretary-General of the Volkswagen Foundation, which made an impassioned plea for creating interdisciplinary, symmetrical, and productive intellectual and institutional collaborations and partnerships between Germans and, more broadly, European researchers and their African counterparts. I enjoyed it. The last welcome address was given by the master of ceremonies, Ulf Ergel, on behalf of the organizing committee of the 3rd European Conference on African Studies, or ECA 3, whose theme "Respecting Africa," he observed jocularly, was actually followed in many of the paper and panel applications.

A great reception was organized in the huge tavern that looks like a rolling cave and was established, so the director of the African studies center at Leipzig told us as we walked there after I and the other officials who had opened the conference signed the guest book, by students at the height of the GDR regime. The students wanted an entertainment space in an old medieval building. Eight years later the university relented. Among the students was Angela Merkel the current German Chancellor. As big as the tavern was, there was hardly any space to walk. Drinks and later dinner were served. I talked to yet more people who complimented me on my lecture. Among them was Helen Neveu, a young lecturer at Oxford. She told me she used one of my essays on the African brain drain in one of her classes. She is biracial, one of her parents is French—I suspect the father given her last name—and the other Senegalese. Pap Ndiaye, the well-known scholar of black France, is her half-brother. She introduced me to her companion from Oxford who it seemed was a PhD student. We entered into discussion on the meaning of "Africa" and "Africans" when he assumed my project on African diaspora was about sub-Saharan Africa. I had to educate him, to his obvious surprise and discomfort, on the politics of Africa's name and I challenged his views that North and sub-Saharan Africa are totally separate even when it comes to the forms of Islam in North and West Africa. It is part of the widespread intellectual laziness in African studies, I told him, which enables people to generalize about the continent often based on one society or country they have studied, something that would be totally unacceptable in studies of other regions such as Europe and Asia.

The rest of the time brought further contentious conversations, this time with one of Carina's friends. I saw on my Blackberry a message from Carina that she had come to the reception to look for me but couldn't see me. I went outside and called and we agreed to join up with her two friends who were planning to have dinner. She picked me up and found a restaurant that was packed on the terrace but had seats inside. It seemed too cold to sit outside, notwithstanding the lamp heaters. She introduced me to Dennis Lauman who received his PhD at UCLA and currently teaches at the University of Memphis and is the President of the Ghana Studies Association, an affiliate of the ASA, and to Nanboko Sackeyfio, who teaches at Dartmouth. For most of the evening Sackeyfio didn't say much except when we were walking to the restaurant. Her father is Ghanaian, her mother is African American, and she has been at Dartmouth for a year. Her biography and even her looks much resembled Natasha's; perhaps that's why I took an immediate liking to her and wished she had talked more. The two of us listened to a series of amicable disputes between Dennis and Carina. Dennis, whose parents are from Germany, happily translated

the menus for us. He quickly tried to establish rapport with me by revealing that his wife was Ghanaian and he pulled out a picture of his biracial son to show me as proof of his bona fides. Maybe I am being too harsh. But I found his views on Cuba, where he thinks there is a little racism; on Zuma, whom he supports; and even Mugabe, for whom he displayed some sympathies, quite disagreeable. Fortunately, I was no longer in the mood for combative debate so I only intervened sporadically to signal my disagreement and left it to Carina to do much of the critique.

Carina seemed a lot happier than the last time I saw her and Salah in New York last year. She has decided to stay at Fordham until she gets tenure. She is looking forward to going to Princeton this fall, for which I wrote her a recommendation, where she intends to complete working on her book manuscript. I learned in the course of the conversation tonight that her mother is from Puerto Rico. She grew up in Los Angeles. Her mother currently lives in the Marina del Rey area near LMU. I was fascinated by her critique of Mahmood Mamdani's latest book on Darfur. She agrees with his critique of the Save Darfur Coalition, but is troubled by his implicit support for the Bashir dictatorship and his inability to take seriously charges of genocide made by Darfurian activists, among whom he is not popular. This echoed what our mutual friend Ahmed Sikainga told me awhile back.

Once again, to my embarrassment I had to ask for a donation to pay for my meal and taxi fare to the hotel. Carina came to my rescue and I promised I would refund her tomorrow. I originally had not planned to come to the conference, but now I had no choice. Dennis kindly helped me by giving the taxi driver directions in German. Back at the hotel I texted Natasha to ask Cassandra to call me. She had a good flight, although her foot had swollen from all that sitting on the plane. She raved about Madrid and our time together and told her mother what a great time she had with her husband. It was so sweet.

June 5, 2009

I spent the whole morning writing a blog on President Obama's much anticipated speech in Cairo. Brilliant in conception and delivery, the speech still left me troubled by some of the equivalences it drew and its silences. While the right-wing commentators on CNN were bothered by what they called his moral equation of the Jewish Holocaust and Palestinians' suffering, I was appalled by his false comparisons between civil rights struggles in the U.S. and Palestinian struggles against colonial occupation, which were more reminiscent of struggles against settler colonialism in Africa, including those against apartheid South Africa. Also troubling was the very justification for the creation of an exclusive Jewish state. As many insightful observers have noted, the Holocaust, a dastardly crime against humanity, was a crime committed by Europe, but its consequences, its resolution, were transferred to Palestine and the price continues to be paid by the Palestinians. That, ultimately, is the historical dilemma of the state of Israel as a Jewish state in a region that had not perpetrated the horrific barbarism of the Holocaust. Israel was the last settler colonial state established by Europe at a time when decolonization was gathering momentum, and equally important, the only exclusive religious settler colonial state in a world of increasing multicultural and democratic governance and citizenship.

I was also not impressed by Obama's tepid entreaties on democracy and human rights: the very fact of presenting a speech in an authoritarian state undermined his message insofar as he spoke in the most generalized of terms and made no specific references to autocracy in Egypt and the neighboring countries and the U.S.'s connivance with it. As an American president, one could not expect him to engage in principled condemnation of U.S. foreign policies, notwithstanding his veiled critiques of the Iraq War and CIA involvement in the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Iran in 1953. But that is the point: the belief that the U.S. is fundamentally a force for good in the world rather than an empire whose actions and destructive interventions are behind the widespread anger and extremism in the so-called Muslim world. 9/11 was not an outburst of some irrational, internal Islamic extremism inspired by atavistic forces in the Muslim world incapable of coming to terms with modernity, but a reaction—desperate and despicable to be sure—against the historical terror of European colonialism now spearheaded by the United States in collaboration with the region's authoritarian regimes. The problem is the very belief that the U.S. is a benign, occasionally corrupt, power, not a ruthless superpower; not because its leaders and even less its people are evil, but because it is an empire and like all empires before it bestrides the globe with impunity.

Around noon, I called a taxi and rushed to the conference to meet Carina. But first I had to get to an ATM machine, which took longer than I anticipated. In the conference hallways, I ran into Martin Murray who I asked to ask his wife, Anne, and Kelly Askew if they could sit for me on the panel on the African Studies Association. Hardly had I walked away when I ran into Kelley. She agreed to do it, although she asked what I had planned to say. One could identify institutional and intellectual trends in United States African studies, such as the growing interest in the field and the need to build effective collaborations with the professional fields, from public health and medicine to law and business. There was also the growing importance of interdisciplinarity in general and diaspora studies in particular which bridged gaps between African and African-American studies and reflected the changes in the racial composition of the field and the growing importance of what Mazrui calls American Africans, the offspring of recent African immigrants, the growth, in short, of the new diasporas. As for linkages and partnerships, there were the perennial questions of how to build symmetrical—not the conventional asymmetrical—relations, especially with African institutions and researchers, an issue I thought had been well covered at the conference she had convened recently at the University of Michigan, which I attended. Besides, I said, as head of the ASA's Institutional Collaborations Committee, she had ideas worth exploring.

Carina found us talking and seemed anxious to go back to the session she was attending. I excused myself briefly to bid her farewell and squeezed the money she had spent on me last night into her hands. As I left, I saw other colleagues, including Obeng who refused my refund, and Cyril Obi who I met last night and sounds as besieged as ever; and Fantu Cheru, the fine Ethiopian scholar who is a director at the Nordic Africa Institute together with Cyril, whose five-year appointment is apparently ending.

I arrived back at the hotel just in time to post another blog, a statement on the U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings in the U.S. and Kenya that had been forwarded to me by Wangui wa Goro based in London. I was pleased to get her mass e-mail, for I hadn't heard from her for a while and was worried as she has been sick.

The taxi driver who picked me up from the airport turned up as we had agreed. He was a pleasant fellow, if a little too talkative for my liking at that time of day, especially

since I was more preoccupied by my trip to India. At least he wasn't as obnoxious as the white South African academic with whom I had shared a ride to the conference, and who delighted in telling me about the paper he will be presenting at the ASA Annual Meeting in New Orleans this November. It's entitled, "Fucking Mothers," he said, a phenomenon in South Africa—where, he didn't say—in which sons and mothers sleep together in the belief that the world is ending. It is an expression of moral panic, but his pleasure seemed to be in the very title that he kept repeating with a sickening laugh. For once, he looked like the stereotypical Boer who enjoys poking fun at blacks. The taxi driver, David, as I found out when he gave me his card, only wanted to talk about his beautiful Armenia and his taxi business, how many people end up being his regular customers because of his jokes and the Armenian music, which was actually nice folkloric pop music.

My relief at getting to the airport proved short-lived. The austere German woman at the check-in informed me that my luggage was overweight and I would have to pay €30 for each extra kilo for a total of €240. I objected that I had traveled with the same luggage from Madrid via Munich; she said my ticket for that leg was business. She certainly didn't want to hear that I had traveled with the same bags. In America, they allow two bags, here we allow 20 kilos, she scowled, and I was overweight by 8 kilos. I stared defiantly at her and said she would have to remove things from the bags for I didn't know what to remove. She quickly picked up the phone and after whispering for a few moments her face suddenly changed and loosened into a smile. It's okay, she said, your bags will be checked to New Delhi. She even mumbled an "I am sorry," when she saw my scornful expression, at which point I warmed up, too; no problems, I said.

The flight became bumpy as we began to descend into Munich. My stomach churned as I had just been reading the story of the Air France plane that crashed earlier in the week. Somehow, it seems so infinitely crueler to die from the air than on the ground. Perhaps it is the gravitational unnaturalness of flying. At the airport in Munich, I grabbed more papers and treated myself to a chicken salad after which I went to buy new supplies.

I was gratified and saddened to see the crowd waiting for the flight to New Delhi was predominantly comprised of Indians. Gratified that it was so, and saddened that it wasn't so on flights to several parts of Africa. India was an important qualification to my thesis on the whiteness of airports. Unlike Haiti, this is not because of its deepening underdevelopment but accelerating development. To my discomfort, the seat next to me on the plane was taken up by a freckled young white man who carried what looked like a Bible—I tried hard to avoid staring. Fortunately, he wasn't the talkative type and so we flew in peace. I was quickly reminded of how difficult it is to sleep in Economy Class. The only consolation was that my seat was in the front row of the Economy Class cabin so I could stretch my legs. The food was another reminder of the *bland discomforts of peasant travel* as I call it. But one has to be grateful for small mercies: the flight was quite smooth.

India

June 6, 2009

India, India. I have heard so much about this country of more than a billion people, with its ancient, glorious empires and kingdoms, the jewel of the British Empire in whose quest Europe is said to have accidentally found the Americas and colonized Africa; a vast subcontinent of diverse cultures, cuisines, and castes; whose sons and daughters are scattered across the world, including Africa and my homeland where they were brought as indentured laborers and rose in the interstices of empire as the middle functionaries of commerce; the world's largest democracy with one of the world's largest middle classes still trapped in the ancient inequalities of caste and color; an emerging global economic power boasting some of the poorest people on Earth; a beguiling land of science and superstition, mystery and modernity; an ancient people in a still-young nation of 62. India, at last! So excited was I when we touched down at the airport in New Delhi.

Sitting on the aisle seat, I hadn't been able to catch the glimpses of the city as we descended. The young man beside me hogged the small window. We landed at 6:45 a.m. local time, which is three and half hours ahead of Leipzig and Munich and Madrid. The terminal where we landed was faintly jaded and a little musty, conditions that improved as we approached immigration and customs. Before going through passport control, we all passed through a medical desk where we submitted forms about the swine flu, or H1N1 virus that caused global panic recently to a group of medical practitioners wearing masks. The immigration official asked me about Canada when I handed him my passport and what I did there. When I told him I live in the U.S., he smiled as he mentioned Obama, but his face quickly hardened as he asked about what the U.S. thought of terrorists. I just gave him a smile for I wasn't sure which terrorists he was talking about.

The baggage claim area was a large hall with low-lying ceilings and floors of what looked like marble. The carts were free, unlike in Leipzig and many American airports. I have never understood the need to charge for carts after one has paid an arm and a leg for a ticket. And now, of course, airlines are piling on additional charges. It used to be that one spent money during flights on duty-free items; now on long U.S. flights expenses include meals, earplugs and baggage. Once I got my baggage, I went to buy a pre-paid taxi ticket and went outside to catch one. I didn't know what I was expecting, but I remember flinching when I saw a row of rundown yellow and black taxis lined up outside the airport. And it was already unbearably hot, and quite crowded, no longer with the well-dressed passengers and uniformed immigration officials, but with multitudes of lesser means and darker hues. The taxi driver, whose name I later learned was Damal Singh, was an exemplar: a dark, skinny man, he welcomed me into his rickety van and banged the door shut. When he looked behind and asked where I was going, it looked like his teeth had never seen dental work. I realized a little later that he hadn't understood what I said, for he pulled a card and showed it to me saying something I couldn't quite make out. Ten minutes or so later he pulled by a building with shining windows and said

airport hotel, I shook my head and repeated that I was going to the Taj Mahal Hotel and showed him my hotel booking. He glanced at the person who had come out of the building and made a barely audible hissing sound. We returned later to the highway.

The streets were packed with cars, buses, rickshaws, motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians. There was constant hooting and pedestrians running across the streets. The chaotic vibrancy was all too familiar. It was hot and dusty since I couldn't close the windows, and there was no air conditioning. The four-lane highway, the massive road construction we passed and crossed at several points, and the smart and multi-colored housing and apartment complexes lined both sides of the highway, which became more elaborate as we drove, added to the vibrancy of an India on the rise that I have read so much about. What caught my attention most of all was how green the city looked. There were luxurious trees, hedges, lawns, flowers, golf courses, roundabouts, and playgrounds. At first I thought this was limited to a few places, but Delhi's green foliage stretched on mile after mile until we got to the hotel itself and, from the window of my hotel room on the seventh floor and the restaurant on the eighth floor facing opposite ends of the building, the city's green canopy seemed endless, the buildings appeared no more than decorative intrusions.

Security was tight as we entered the hotel. The taxi was checked at the gate and I went through a metal detector. I gave the taxi driver a small tip for which he gave me a broad smile. With great difficulty, we had tried to converse. I surmised he has three kids and I told him I have two. This was one time I was dying to talk but didn't get very far.

It is an incredibly beautiful hotel, almost lavish. The entrance and lobby are large and exquisitely furnished. The reception area, as tends to be the case at well-appointed hotels or for special guests, had a set of three or four desks, and I was led to one. The staff—three men and a woman—was impeccably dressed in black jackets and black striped pants. I was greeted with the exaggerated politeness and friendliness of such check-ins. I was amused when I was told that because of my American Express Platinum card I had been upgraded to the club level. The staff accompanied me to the room as two bell men carried my luggage. It is a lovely room with a king-size bed, a couch and a large flat-screen TV, a fax machine and several telephones, a black marble desk, and a coffee table with fruits both fresh and dried, and three daily newspapers and several magazines. He explained the use of the panel by the bedside that controlled the lights, the drapes, the sheers, the air conditioning, and even the privacy sign. He asked me if I needed drinks, which he could arrange for. All along, a smile was glued to his face. It was a little too much. The person who brought a cappuccino and a glass of juice wore a similar demeanor said he was my butler. The waiters on the eighth floor were also obsequious when I went to the club restaurant for breakfast. Courtesy is good, but this seemed a little over the top, except that they didn't seem to be feigning it.

After breakfast I decided to sleep, there was no way I could stay up until the night. It was a sweet, deep sleep of several hours and when I awoke I felt fresh and ready to begin experiencing India for real. Dr. Vidham Pathak came at 5:00 p.m. as we had agreed when I contacted him earlier in the day. He was accompanied by a colleague whose name I failed to catch. A friendly man of my height, we immediately seemed to click. I explained the project in a little more detail, including the payment plan, and he indicated the program he had planned so far and that he would plan the rest of the program including confirming my contacts in the three other cities as soon as possible. He said I should not hesitate to contact him for anything. For tomorrow, he suggested, I go to the Taj Mahal,

four hours' drive each way, and gave me the number of a tour operator he knows quite well who would be able to arrange for an escort if needed. We talked a little about personal backgrounds. He remarked that I looked much younger than he expected, to which I gave my usual mantra that looks can be deceiving. Perhaps because I felt comfortable with him and was keen for our partnership to work well, I mentioned that I am 54 and finished my PhD in 1982. They both gasped—Pathak was in school; his colleague was a child. I asked him about his experiences in Ethiopia where he recently spent a year at Addis Ababa University. He seemed quite pleased and said he had learned much about the country itself and the continent in general. His colleague has completed a dissertation on Sudanese relations with Asian countries, including India and China. Given the article I wrote on China and Africa, I became quite fascinated by his brief descriptions of the project and we all agreed that it is indeed important for scholars in Africa and the U.S. to become familiar with the work of Asian Africanists.

As they got ready to leave, I beckoned the waiter to pay for the tea. Pathak and I seemed pleased with our meeting and looked forward to begin working on Monday. As I got to the elevator, the guard opened the door with the ubiquitous hotel smile. When I ordered room service for dinner, the food was delivered by a butler wearing gloves who carefully arranged the sitting area to put the dining table he had brought. I thanked him. It was probably clear to him that I am not used to this, but of course, he didn't show it.

June 7, 2009

It was truly a wonderful day. Kunal Mittal, a technology assistant in my department at UIC, came to pick me up for a tour of Delhi a little after 12:00 noon. I had called him when I woke up after 10:30 a.m. It was actually the second time I woke up. I first got up around 4:00 a.m. and read online papers. Around 7:00 a.m. I went back to sleep and when I woke up I took a late breakfast. There was one other person eating, a white man, who was reading a paper. Then two Indian women came in and sat in the lounge chairs facing the window next to my table, where I had also sat yesterday. I wonder whether the place is ever full. On television, I heard India was trying to convince tourists to return following the terrorist attacks at a major hotel last year. And I am told this is a low season anyway because it is summer both in India and the rich countries of the North.

Kunal brought his father's car and driver. I was reminded how when we see foreign students in the U.S. we often have no clue of their class backgrounds, especially if they are coming from the global South. This is, of course, something many of us who are faculty administrators from the global South are only too aware of, unlike many of our colleagues and the average American student. Kunal's father is a chemical engineer who works in a fertilizer plant. I also learned later in the course of the day that his aunt and uncle on his father's side are also highly educated professionals, a medical doctor and an architect, respectively. On his mother's side, they are more into business. At UIC, and even in our department, I am sure the people he comes into contact only see him as an Indian student lucky enough to come to America to uplift his benighted family from poverty.

It was an incredible afternoon as we spent the next six hours visiting various parts of Delhi, including the government quarter, the historic forts and monuments such as the

India Gate, Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb, and Qutub Minar, and drove through various sections of this vast, sprawling city. I can see some of the major government buildings that we drove to from my hotel window. The original heart of New Delhi, planned by Sir Edward Lutyens under British imperial rule, is the government quarter and has a collection of key buildings including the President's Palace, Parliament, and other government buildings. The buildings are as grand as the avenues around them; loud pronouncements of power. Built of marble and stone, the President's Palace combines classical styles and a hint of Indian architecture, while Parliament, with its magnificent circular structure, evokes more modern styles and Indo-British fusion. We got out by the gates to the President's Palace, which is of course heavily guarded. Independence parades are held along the wide boulevard—the Rajpath—and grounds that face a distance away from the India Gate. Built in 1931, the Gate commemorates the 90,000 Indian soldiers who died in World War I, some of whose names are inscribed in the walls of the arc. There is also an eternal flame commemorating the unknown soldiers who perished in the 1971 war between India and Pakistan. The grounds around the gate were crowded with visitors, overwhelmingly Indian, young and old, men and women, and vendors selling snacks and fruits and drinks. In the surrounding lawns and lakes were people enjoying picnics and boat rides. We walked around for a while.

From India Gate we drove to the Red Fort at the heart Old Delhi and the Mughal Empire, which ruled much of India and Pakistan. Built in the seventeenth century by Shah Jahan, it is a massive complex that showcases in its multiple buildings, canals, grounds, and layout the architectural and artistic brilliance and grandeur of the Mughals. In front, close to the Delhi Gate, stand the Chandni Chowk and the Daryaganj market, all of which were crowded with people and vendors. To enter the fort we had to purchase tickets—250 INR for me, the foreigner, and 10 INR for Kunal. But it was worth it. We were searched upon entrance and passed through a metal detector. In the vast corridors leading to the main buildings is a bazaar of stalls, the Chatta Chowk, selling trinkets and behind them food and bottled water and mineral drinks. Kunal, who had brought large bottles insisted that we get more and implored me to drink. Inside a large open space opens up leading to the ornate balcony where the emperor used to sit to address his audiences. Behind it are the exquisite imperial apartments. Other buildings display the same levels of fine craftsmanship, the incredible attention to detail and stunning aesthetics—the gilded, decorated marble walls and ceilings, and the windows of stone carved into fine mesh, and the cool corridors. The gardens, pools and channels of water, since restored for this World Historical Site, add to the preoccupation of the Mughals for beauty and fine living.

Humayun's tomb, our next stop, was no less impressive. Like the Great Pyramids in Egypt, it is a monument to power beyond death. It was apparently built by Humayun's widow in the mid-sixteenth century and designed by a Persian architect. The interior chambers, including Humayun's central chamber, are remarkable for their intricate designs, layout, and striking execution. Among the great structures to use red sandstone and white marble, the building is said to have been the inspiration for the Taj Mahal. Then we went to Lodhi Gardens, a vast site with several impressive buildings, including the tombs of Mohammed Shah and Sikander Lodi. At the first tomb, we ran into a group of Indians from Fiji, two men and two women who were visiting India for the first time, who we talked to and took pictures with. They were clearly astonished by their distant heritage. They had come from Mumbai, which they didn't seem to like too much for its congestion and what they called filthiness.

Our last visit of the great historic sites was Qutub Minar, the world's tallest brick minaret at 238 feet high, built in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Like the other sites we visited, it is a World Heritage Site. Its smooth, ornamented columns of red sandstone stand in staggering majesty around several structures reminiscent of ancient and Islamic architecture. The gardens are also spectacular. They were filled with couples, families, and the occasional lonely hearts. Enclosed in the complex is the Iron Pillar from the fourth century that has withstood the winds of time unrusted.

The tours to the monuments took us to various parts of the city and we drove past other memorable landmarks of Delhi from River Yamuna and the mausoleums of Mahatma Gandhi and Indira and Rajiv Gandhi to the complex of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS), the country's biggest and most respected medical college in south Delhi. Across the Green Park neighborhood, Safdarjung Airport where Sanjay Gandhi crashed his plane, to Indira Gandhi's house where she was assassinated, to the Prime Minister's Residence and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library to Connaught Place also known as Rajiv Chowk, one of the city's most vibrant business centers with its banks and commercial buildings, and a cultural square on top of one of the major metro underground stations and markets called Palie Bazaar. They even drove me to a mall but it was closed, and to a small shopping center, which we entered and perused the men's clothes, the kurta suits which I plan to buy at some point.

Kunal was an incredible guide, very knowledgeable about Indian history and clearly deeply patriotic. In the course of the afternoon we discussed a whole range of subjects from India's history during different periods to India's relations with Pakistan, the U.S., and now Australia following racist attacks on Indian students in that country; India's fast economic growth and how it compares to China, its historic rival; the varied characters of different parts of Delhi and the country's various regions and cities; his desire to visit Africa and his curiosities about African countries and how India and Indians are perceived. We also talked at length about his largely positive experience in the U.S., how it has broadened his world view and exposed him to new experiences, cultures, and communities. By the time he and the driver dropped me off I had developed a greater fondness for him than our cursory interactions at UIC could ever permit. I thanked the driver for his patience and for explaining some of the sites we drove past. Kunal dutifully translated. The driver laughed when I commended him on his elegant kurta and said I wanted one just like it. I asked Kunal to thank his father for lending the car for my tour of Delhi, which I would never forget. He said I was the best person to go on tour with because my enthusiasm for the city and the places we visited never seemed to flag. As a historian, I responded, the sites aroused my imagination, the sense of wonder about human creativity notwithstanding our less nobler instincts for destruction.

I kept to my decision not to order room service for dinner. I went to the Indian restaurant on the ground floor below the lobby. The stairs are made of white marble and between the twin sets of stairs is a marble fountain, besides which were candles and flowers. Although it was dark outside, the dim garden lights, in which I could catch reflections of chairs and the shimmering waters of the pool suggested a place of seductive relaxation. The restaurant itself lived up to its billing for serving delicious modern Indian cuisine with its subtle lighting, chic tables and cutlery, soft music, and elegant servers. Besides me there was only one other person eating alone, a white woman, and the rest were couples or groups, both locals and tourists.

June 8, 2009

My sleep is fully back to normal, for I only got up with the wakeup call which I had set for 8:00 a.m. I needed to work on my presentation for later today, "Studying African Diasporas: Are There Different Atlantic and Indian Ocean Models?" By the time I was picked up about two and half hours later, I had come up with seven pages, enough for an hour's presentation, largely concocted from my lecture notes on my course on African diasporas posted on Blackboard. The marvels of modern technology!

A PhD student from Jawaharlal Nehru University, popularly known as JNU, came to pick me up, or rather to accompany me to the campus, for we had to get a taxi from the hotel. Unlike yesterday, traffic was heavy, the driving even more chaotic but safe. The campus is located on a large green lot of several hundred acres in which the red brick buildings, consisting of offices, dormitories, classrooms, laboratories, and libraries are carved out of the natural landscape. The student gladly explained the different buildings and pointed to his dorm as we drove past it.

We found Professor Dubey waiting for us at the School of International Studies in his office, together with Dr. Pathak and two other colleagues—a woman lecturer in the Center for West Asian and African Studies and a man from another New Delhi university. The building housing the School was clean, if worn, and plastered with remnants of posters. Professor Dubey's office, on the third floor, was also clean but could barely hide its age. We were served tea and coffee. It reminded me of Kenyatta University in Nairobi where I taught for six years.

Professor Dubey began by graciously introducing me to his colleagues. He remarked that I seem to have lost weight since we last met in Grahamstown at Rhodes University in South Africa last year. He gave a brief background of JNU, founded in its current form in 1969. It is primarily a graduate school with 500 faculty and 5,000 students, all of whom live on campus. It is funded entirely by the state and organized in interdisciplinary schools, not disciplinary departments. Considering that its budget is similar to that of Delhi University, which has 200,000 students, JNU is relatively well endowed in terms of resources. Faculty members are appointed for life and they hardly move. While salaries are modest, everything is covered, from housing to health care. Students receive stipends and hardly pay any tuition beyond a token fee. There is little pressure, therefore, for faculty or students to seek external funding. Indeed offers of donor funding from foundations and corporations have been vigorously opposed by militant student groups, which tend to be left wing and quite vocal. What a contrast to the capitalist culture and political apathy on most American campuses today!

He explained the history and organization of the Center for West Asian and African Studies (CWAAS) before he turned his attention to the African Association of India and the main purpose of our conversation. In August, a separate department of African studies will be created out of CWAAS, which currently has twelve faculty, if I heard him correctly. The new department will hire four new faculty members. Currently, the Africa section of the CWAAS has 40 doctoral students, 10 master's of philosophy students as well as numerous students doing master of arts programs in international studies covering African topics. It is certainly larger than the African studies programs at Mumbai and Delhi universities. They have the Mandela Chair, which they use to bring foreign scholars to JNU. Previously targeted at South Africans, it will now be covering the whole of Africa.

He further explained that African studies in India has had a long history since independence. Prime Minister Nehru was very committed to Afro-Asian solidarity. But Africa was downgraded when India began opening up to the West and pursuing economic liberalization. This affected African studies, which lost its previous standing and support. But now India is once again beginning to turn serious attention to Africa. This is no longer motivated by politics of Third World solidarity but largely by economic interests in which Indian businesses seek to expand into Africa. India is finding it hard to compete with China, as was evident in Angola when it was outbid by China for a major infrastructure project, but progress is being made as is clear from the recent purchase of 49% shares in the South African telecommunications giant, MTN. India has also made forays into Sudan after initially resisting overtures from the Sudanese government. It was obvious at the recent India-Africa summit that India is becoming a major player in Africa and it is taking the continent more seriously than ever. The AU has asked India to help it with developing its diaspora policy, an area in which India has made incredible progress. Previously, India shunned its diaspora. This was both because the Indian diaspora was distrusted for its potential disloyalty and Nehru was concerned about overseas Indians not integrating in their societies and becoming similar to white South Africans under apartheid. The conversation on the Indian diaspora continued at lunch — how and why the government changed its policy, and the enormous success in courting it and its effects on the country's rapid economic growth. Professor Dubey is conducting a project on the Indian diaspora in the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, Seychelles, Réunion, and Southern Africa. In fact, we met at a diaspora conference at Rhodes where he discussed his project and I presented on mine. When we returned to his office after lunch, he gave me copies of his edited book, *Indian Diaspora: Global Identity* and the journal he edits, *Diaspora Studies*, to whose editorial board he said he would invite me to join. He also invited me to send a contribution to the journal.

Professor Dubey is the General Secretary of the African Studies Association of India, which was established in 2003 to promote and foster African studies in the country. It serves as an umbrella organization linking individuals and institutions pursuing African studies across the country and seeks to forge mutually productive relations with institutions in Africa itself and African studies associations in other parts of the world. The association, which recently established a partnership with AEGIS, largely focused on conferences and publications, is keen to do the same with the ASA in the United States. Some of its conferences and events are organized in conjunction with other organizations and agencies. It is particularly keen to promote interactions with African civil society. Among the conferences it has organized or co-organized are: "Emerging Trends in Indo-African Relations," in 2004; "Indo-African Relations: New Avenues," in 2005; "France and Africa: An Indian Perspective," also in 2005; "India and Indian Diasporas in Francophone Africa: A Comparative Perspective," in 2006; "Francophone sub-Saharan Africa: Issues in Foreign Policy and Development," also in 2006; "India-Sudan: Lessons from Nation Building and Development-Cooperation," in 2007; "India and Francophone sub-Saharan Africa Under Globalization," also in 2007; and "Africa-India Partnership in 21st Century," in 2008. Proceedings from several of these conferences have been published in books and the association has also published three periodicals, *Africa Review*, *ASA News*, and *Africa Insight*; two of which are refereed journals. With funding from the Ford Foundation, the association conducts programs on South African studies, including doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships.

ASA India would like to enter into a formal relationship with ASA USA as part of its drive to build international linkages, which will be beneficial to its members, exposing

them to trends in African studies in other parts of the world. I thanked him for his comprehensive overview of African studies in India and the activities of ASA India. I began by assuring him that ASA USA was keen on building its international linkages as well. Despite its relatively long history, this was a new initiative on part of the association, so we did not have a set of developed policies and were quite open to ideas. I divided my remarks into three parts: first, a brief history of African studies in the U.S.—its intellectual, institutional and ideological dynamics; second, a brief history of the African Studies Association and how it was trying to respond to the changing configurations and constituencies of African studies and Africa in the country; third, its efforts to build international linkages. Earlier in the morning, I e-mailed him a copy of our memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Association of African Universities and reiterated that we were open to mutually beneficial collaborations covering several pertinent areas. Such areas could include participation in each other's annual conferences, facilitating research collaborations for our respective members, promoting exchanges for faculty and students, both in person and virtually, and encouraging policy dialogues.

He indicated that it would make most sense to begin by collaborating in activities that our respective associations are already engaged in, starting with the annual conferences. The problem on their part was paying membership and registration fees. They do not charge such fees, while we of course depend on them. Would it be possible for ASA USA to provide concessionary membership and conference rates for members of ASA India? He, and later the dean, pointed out that such an arrangement had recently been devised with the International Studies Association. I thought this was an intriguing idea that would require consideration and I would appreciate seeing a copy of the MOU with the ISA. We both agreed that it would be wonderful if we could draw up an MOU that could be signed at our annual meeting in November. He pointed out that their annual meeting would also be November 9–11. The first day would be devoted entirely to the topic of Asia and Sudan, and the next day would feature, among other topics, South African foreign policy. ASA India could provide free registration and local hospitality, including transport to and from the airport, and accommodation for any of our members who wished to attend. It was too late to pay for their tickets. It hit me how different this is from the way we conduct business. Of course, the Indian model is similar to what is the norm in Africa. It partly reflects the fact that, as Professor Dubey noted, faculty are not normally provided with internal funds for conferences and other external projects. But even in the U.S., this is becoming increasingly a fiction for faculty in small or public universities. Beyond money, though, is a culture of collegiality that is solely lacking in America's academic capitalism.

Professor Dubey briefly took me to meet the dean for a courtesy call. An affable and dark-skinned man—you could easily mistake him for an African—with gray hair, he pumped my hands saying he had expected to meet a much older man. He offered drinks and I opted for mango juice. He went over some of the ground already covered by Professor Dubey about the history of the school, the impending creation of the African studies department, and the interest of ASA India to strengthen its international profile. I reassured him that Professor Dubey and I had a fruitful discussion and we would follow up.

For lunch, we went to a local restaurant in what turned out to be a neighborhood near the Qutub Minar historic site I visited yesterday. The crowded, dusty street and haphazardly built apartments could be anywhere in poorer parts of African cities. The food was excellent and cheap. Professor Dubey ordered different dishes of chicken and types of bread. Initially, I thought we would each order what we wanted, but there was clearly a structure

of authority in play. The others only talked when I directly asked them questions. As a result, I did not find out much about them. On one subject, they all seemed eager to contribute their thoughts and that was on the question of Indian and African diasporas. The African diaspora was important in Indian history, they said, although much of its history was only beginning to be studied systematically. The Qutub Minar, for example, involved African architects and builders, I learned. They mentioned several students doing research on the subject. In fact, on Professor Dubey's desk I had seen a dissertation on the history of Siddis by a student in Delhi University that he was supervising.

Following lunch, we talked briefly before I took a taxi back to the university together with the student I had come with. In fact, we went back in the same taxi that brought us. I was surprised that they had asked the driver to wait for more than four hours: it was cheaper than using two different taxis, they said. I was a little taken aback. Professor Dubey instructed the student to show me around campus before returning to the hotel, which he did. Another surprise was in store for me when we reached the hotel. I had two hours before going to the lecture presentation. The student insisted on waiting for me in the lobby while I rested!

A driver came to pick me up from the International India Center where I was to give a talk. At the Center, I was warmly welcomed by the Director, a cheerful woman with a touch of sternness, Dr. Sharma. Professor Dubey, Dr. Pathak, and the other two colleagues I had spent the earlier part of the day with were already there. There was a small sit-down reception where we were served drinks and snacks. The conversation eventually settled on violence against Indian students in Australia. Dr. Sharma gave an insightful analysis of the factors behind the violence, that these were not merely students but potential immigrants competing with low income Australian workers for jobs in a country whose white identity was under threat by Asian immigration and whose civilizational superiority was threatened by the rise of China and India. She has done research on Australia and she mentioned that her husband has done work on Indian migration.

The lecture hall was packed, mostly with what looked like students. I talked for about 50 minutes, only periodically referring to my notes. The lecture was a hit. Dr. Sharma called it brilliant and so did many others who talked to me afterwards, including Dr. Sharma's husband who had come. In fact, the two of them invited me to lunch on Wednesday. The husband used to be India's Counsel General in Chicago for four years. Their two children were educated at UIC and one proceeded to do an MBA at Northwestern. The questions in the question-and-answer period were probing and informed. This allowed me to elaborate on key issues concerning African diasporas in various world regions. Dr. Sharma asked if I could submit a written version of the paper incorporating the elaborations from the Q & A for publication in their occasional publication series, copies of which she gave me at the reception. During the discussion, I learned more about the African diaspora in India, that it was indeed both free and unfree and they were both subjects and rulers who established their own kingdoms and left a lasting legacy on different parts of India. I felt more strongly than ever that the Atlantic model is of limited utility to the African Indian diaspora. But the questions that kept cropping up in different guises, for which I am still working to develop an adequate conception, is what makes the diverse diasporas African? I actually began with discussing the difficulties of defining both "diaspora" and "African" and their mutual constitution in the term "African diaspora." That indeed is the challenge of the project whose answer lies in the very process of producing a new overall synthesis of Africa's multiple diasporas in time and space.

By the time I returned, it was nearly 10:00 p.m. I was tempted to go for dinner but I settled on eating the mangoes I bought with Kunal yesterday at a street kiosk. Kunal was

amazed that I wanted to buy mangoes on the street. I was no longer that distant Department Head in America, but a man from the Third World who relished the simple pleasures of fresh fruits, of ravishing and sucking succulent, sweet mangoes. I tasted each of the three varieties I bought. They were heavenly!

June 9, 2009

One of the colleagues of Dr. Pathak, Sandipani Dash, who had come with him last Saturday, picked me up from the hotel before 11:00 a.m. for my scheduled visit with Dr. Raghuraj Singh Chauhan, a renowned expert on Africans in India. We met him in his office at the National Museum of India where he works as the Director of Exhibitions and Public Relations. He was sitting with two other men who stayed for the duration of our conversation. Dr. Pathak joined us soon after Sandipani and I arrived.

A friendly, forceful man who talks fast so that it was often hard to follow him, he greeted me warmly. "There are many Obamas here," he began with a twinkle intended to shock me. "Many Africans were rulers in India," he explained. Africans in India have occupied all manner of positions, from slaves to royalty, a history that is quite unusual for African diasporas, or for any diaspora for that matter. It is quite remarkable in that the African rulers presided over kingdoms in which they were a minority.

He began by noting that the African presence in several parts of what is today India goes back many centuries and has undergone several periods. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that there was trade between India and Ethiopia during Axumite times; coins from Aksum have been uncovered in India. During the early period of African migrations to India, most came as traders. Among them was Bava Gor, who began the agate trade in Gujarat. Today, his tomb is a center of pilgrimage for African Indians. Other Africans came as slaves. Slavery in India has a complex history. Slaves were bought and sold from many different places and communities, so it was not confined to Africans. It was different from slavery in the Americas. The enslaved Africans at first were brought to India by the Arabs. Later the Europeans, especially the Portuguese, brought enslaved Africans as well. Africans also came to India as soldiers in Muslim armies. Finally, there were those who came as sailors. In fact, during the Mughal Empire, the Africans developed one of the most formidable navies in the region based at their fortress in Janjira.

The Africans were commonly known as Habshi, meaning Abyssinians, and later as Siddis from the Arabic term *sayyid* meaning master. Whatever their social origins, they became a powerful political force in the Deccan where in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries they rose to power and established several sultanates including, Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar. Among the greatest of these rulers was Malik Ambar who posed a great threat to the Mughals in North India. Dr. Chauhan regaled us with stories of Malik Ambar's heroism and the hatred he provoked among the Mughals, one of whose emperors painted him with an arrow pointed at his head on a stake. The Habshi brought so few women that they were forced to marry local women, but their legacies in speech, music, and dance persisted. Their influences extended to architecture and town planning, remnants of which can still be seen today in various forts, gates, monuments, water works, minarets (such as the shaking minarets in Gujarat), mosques, and tombs across the Deccan and southwest India. Portraits of Malik Ambar survive and Dr. Chauhan later took us to the Museum's section on miniature paintings to show us some of them. Africans

are also depicted in many other paintings of African rulers, courtiers, performers, and eunuchs. He insisted that the African presence was not confined to the Deccan but extended to North India, Bengal, and Gujarat. In the late fifteenth century, Habshi sultanates briefly emerged in Bengal and large numbers of Africans lived in Mughal India, some of whom rose to high positions. Two of the African kingdoms, Janjira established in 1618 by an emissary of Malik Ambar called Siddi Ambar Sainak, and Sachin, which was established by Siddi Mohammad Abdul-Karim Khan in 1791, survived until the time of India's independence in 1947.

It was an amazing, breathtaking story, not so much because I didn't know the broad outlines of the African diaspora in India, which I did, having read several studies including the edited collection on *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, but because this was the first time I was hearing the story told by an Indian scholar. Dr. Chauhan has written a book, which he encouraged me to buy, *Africans in India: from Slavery to Royalty*. He gave me other titles as well, one of which I was able to buy at a local bookstore after we left the museum, *African Elites in India*, a beautifully illustrated history of African kingdoms and rulers in the country. Africans in India, he concluded as he took us to see a Malik Ambar painting and the naval powers of the Siddis in Janjira, achieved in India a long time ago what Obama has just achieved in the U.S. hundreds of years later. He was pleased that the field of African Indian studies and history was finally receiving its due recognition. It had been a long struggle for him, but it was worth it. He had to learn Portuguese and Arabic and poured over archives in Mumbai and elsewhere.

After we said goodbye to each other, Dr. Pathak and Sandipani suggested that we visit the rest of the museum on our own. We started on the first floor with its sculpture of Vishnu and other deities, representations of the Happan civilization, and the various rooms containing ornaments and bronze artifacts and reconstructions of various places of India's long and rich civilization. Then we went back to the second floor to the miniature paintings, the fascinating sections on scripts, iconography and coins, and the maritime heritage. All was truly impressive, awe inspiring, indeed.

Sandipani and I took the same taxi we had come in which the driver had waited for us the whole time. We drove to a nearby market where we found the bookstore we had been referred to by Dr. Chauhan. Small and packed, wall to wall and floor to ceiling, the book seller had no trouble finding the book we were looking for. I would have wished to spend more time perusing the many exciting books on India and by Indian scholars and writers on various subjects, but Sandipani was pressed for time.

Four hours later, I was back at the hotel and I briefly toyed with the idea of sitting by the pool to while away the rest of the afternoon, but the terrifying heat would not allow it so I went to my room and took a nap. After waking up I started reading and rummaging through the numerous magazines I had brought with me which I subscribe to—*The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *Harper's*, *Money*, *Black Enterprise*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *The Economist*, if only to lighten the luggage and make room for the materials I have acquired here.

June 10, 2009

I was a little disappointed that the student Dr. Pathak had wanted me to see and talk to couldn't make it because he had just had an operation. He recently defended a PhD

dissertation on the African diaspora in India at JNU. I will see if I can get the dissertation. Other than that, it was a productive day.

After breakfast, I decided to walk to one of the nearest shopping centers to get some money from an ATM machine. The beauty of contemporary travel is that one does not have to carry loads of cash or traveler's checks. Hardly had I walked out of the air-conditioned comfort of the hotel when I briefly wondered whether to take a taxi. The heat and humidity were brutal. But I persisted. This was no worse than Chicago's oppressive summers when I occasionally walk around, or those enervating summers of Jamaica where I used to walk all the time since I had no car. Malawi doesn't get this hot, though.

I made it to the Khan Market, a sprawling collection of small shops and open air kiosks, a bazaar packed with people and cars, including the ubiquitous yellow and black taxis. At the first bank I went to I was unable to get any money. I was luckier at the next ATM a few moments later and drew 10,000 INR rupees, which came to only U.S. \$211. By then I was lost with no clue of how to get to the International India Institute (IIC) where I was supposed to meet Dr. Kavita Sharma, the Director, and her husband Ambassador Jagdish Sharma, for lunch at 1:00 p.m. I had her card so I knew the street, but the first group of people I asked was not terribly helpful. Some didn't seem to understand me, others shook their heads, a couple of store guards just pointed without clear directions, one sent me in the wrong direction or perhaps I didn't understand him well. Finally, an elderly man in a jewelry store with whom our respective Englishes were mutually intelligible finally pointed me in the right direction.

I arrived at the IIC with enough time to go to the bathroom to wash my dripping face and sweaty neck. Dr. Sharma was talking to one of her colleagues when I knocked. She welcomed me in and finished her conversation as we waited for her husband who turned up promptly at 1:00. She took us to the restaurant in the building, which was already full of employees from the Center. The workers bowed their heads as we walked in. A charming woman wearing a pink shirt and a beautiful sari, she tried to make me feel comfortable by talking about her experiences in the U.S. when she was a Fulbright Century Scholar at the University of Chicago. She said she didn't like the university itself, for she didn't get much out of it, but she enjoyed living in Hyde Park where she bonded with the African Americans in the building where she lived. She recounted taking buses and trains, how she always found African Americans, especially the older women so friendly and helpful. Several times she went to black churches and even visited Louis Farrakhan's mosque, attended one of his sermons, an experience she described as a little scary for its racially charged message. She asked how my research had gone and reiterated how much she enjoyed my lecture last night.

For a while, the three of us talked about Indian-African relations, how India is more of a natural partner for Africa than China based on the shared histories of colonization and independence struggles, political solidarity in the non-aligned movement and even through the Commonwealth, and cultural similarities from popular attitudes to customary practices and traditions. There are also some racial affinities insofar as India has many different peoples, some of them quite dark and African-looking. Ambassador Sharma told a story of a major international conference at which the head of one of the southern states was mistaken for a Kenyan minister, another from the northeast was mistaken for Chinese and another from the northwest for a southern European. He laughed as he said this, a clear illustration of India's multiracial and multicultural diversity, which many African states and other democracies struggling with diversity could learn from. India,

of course is far from solving the tensions and conflicts that come with its diversity. I added that I thought India's democracy is in fact one advantage India holds over China for Africa's aspiring democracies. But, ultimately, the relationship between Africa and India can only grow and flourish, he insisted, if it is based on strong and sustainable economic ties. That is the real challenge, which both sides are acutely aware of as evident in the deliberations at the India-Africa summit last year. He thought that besides trade, India's major contribution to Africa could be in the field of education and training. True, many African students come to India, but this could be ratcheted up and developed more systematically. I mentioned that Malawi's current president, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, did his undergraduate education in India, at Delhi University, if I was not mistaken. He agreed and revealed he had actually met the president when he recently visited India together with some of his ministers, two who were also Indian trained.

Dr. Sharma had an appointment at 2:00 p.m. so she decided to leave us in the restaurant. We will be fine, Ambassador Sharma said cheekily. We had a great time as I listened to his passion for and work on diaspora issues. He traced his interest in the Indian diaspora to two events. On his first posting to Vancouver, Canada, as a diplomat, he came face to face with the transnational ramifications of events in India for the diaspora. He arrived the same day that the Indian army surrounded the Golden Temple. Fearing for his safety and that of his family in this city, which had a sizeable Indian diaspora, the Canadian government put him under police protection. The second incident involved the Indian diaspora from Fiji which approached him following a coup on that island and the new government's antipathy to Fijians of Indian descent. They wanted him to ask the Indian government to put pressure on Fiji and the international community. These were people who had never been to India, whose grandparents or great grandparents left India in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, but felt entitled to Indian support and protection. He became more convinced than ever of the connections between the diaspora and India, how events in India had an international impact through the diaspora and events in the diaspora had an impact on India's foreign policies. So he began to study and write on diaspora issues and to convince his colleagues in government of the need to develop appropriate diaspora policies in place of the old indifferent and hands-off approach. The higher he rose in diplomatic service and in the foreign ministry, the more he was able to push this agenda, with which he succeeded when he became Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and wrote the influential report that laid the basis for India's current diaspora policy, which has successfully mobilized the Indian diaspora for the country's development.

Developing an effective diaspora policy is not easy, he emphasized, as we ate our desserts. One has to understand the character of the diaspora. They are often demanding, in fact more demanding than in their countries of residence. They complain a lot about their home countries, the poor conditions, inadequate services, crime; they feel superior to the locals. This requires, at one level, developing realistic policies and infrastructure that address education and health services. The diaspora is concerned about their health and the education of their children. Without providing adequate levels of these two, they will not come back. At another level, while it is important to massage their egos, it is also critical to make them become more realistic, to remind them that the things they complain about occur in their countries of residence, to pull them down a peg or two he said with laughter, but subtly, not too aggressively. In addition, of course there is a need to develop appropriate investment policies and citizenship policies that recognize dual citizenship, overseas citizens, and so on. India has developed three categories.

Because of his work as the architect of the Indian diaspora policy, he is now frequently invited by international organizations and governments as a consultant. He recently advised the Ethiopian government and he would be happy to advise the Malawian government, which I indicated needs to develop such a policy. The bulk of Malawi's diaspora is of course in southern Africa where it was created out of the region's labor migration system. Besides the familiar Indian diaspora in Africa, Europe, North America, and English speaking-Caribbean, Ambassador Sharma claimed he brought to light to the Indian government the diaspora in the French territories of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Many years ago, he was the first Indian diplomat to visit the two islands after India gained its independence. He was stunned to be welcomed at the airport in Martinique by more than 200 people of Indian descent. Remarkably, they were wearing fashions that had long disappeared in India itself and the kind of jewelry that in India is only worn on formal occasions such as weddings—showing the power of the diaspora to retain traditions long abandoned in the homeland itself. When a meeting was held in India bringing together the country's far-flung diaspora, the diaspora from Martinique and Guadeloupe was well represented which came as a surprise to many people.

We only left the restaurant because his cell phone rang: cell phones are not allowed. We briefly went to his wife's office where he arranged a car for me to go the Indian Council of World Affairs to collect a CD of the report he mentioned. I thanked him and hoped we would keep in touch.

After getting lost around Barakhamba Road, one of the main thoroughfares in the business district, with its skyscrapers and the ever present kiosks, the driver found the Council. Unfortunately, nobody could locate a CD of the report, although I was able to meet the librarian, Chhaya Sharma, a friendly woman who offered to help me with my project, and a young research fellow working on the Indian diaspora, Ginu Zacharia Oommen, who gave me a paper he had just written on the Indian diaspora in the Gulf. Particularly interesting was an older man, a former diplomat, who kept me company as I waited for the Deputy Director. He explained what the Council does; it serves as a kind of think tank for former Indian diplomats. He himself had served in eight countries from Chile to Egypt, Bangladesh, and Moldova. From all these postings, he had learned one fundamental thing: people everywhere have the same needs regardless of race or religion or nationality. On a daily basis, people do not think about their race or religion. They are concerned about their subsistence, work, families, children's education, their health, and so on. This served as a prelude to a bitter attack on Pakistan and its religious fanatics who have ruined their own country and the possibilities of good relations with India. The problem with Pakistan, he explained, is that without Islam they are Hindus, but they don't want to face that fact. Arab Muslims, African Muslims and other Muslims have their own cultures they can fall back on if they were not Muslims, the Pakistanis don't. I found this intriguing but not entirely convincing, the notion that Pakistanis sought to be more Muslim than other Muslims. One could, of course, easily challenge that by noting that Muslim fundamentalists are not confined to Pakistanis, nor indeed is religious fundamentalism a monopoly of Muslims—one can easily point to Christian and Jewish fundamentalists all over the world, and of course Hindu fundamentalists in India itself. But I did not want to wear out my welcome with this slim, gentlemanly former diplomat who smiled easily, exposing toothless gums.

The Deputy Director was not much help in locating a copy of Ambassador Sharma's report. He then took me to meet Chhaya who, in turn, introduced me to Ginu. I was struck by the Deputy Director and Ginu. They could easily pass for sub-Saharan Africans

with their very dark skin and general phenotypes. It reinforces the point made earlier by Dr. Sharma and her husband, indeed what I had observed ever since arriving in India, how many of the Indians I saw walking in the streets and in the markets and at the historic sites were not the Caucasoid Indians of Bollywood films, but colored folks, as they would say in the U.S., who look like black brothers and sisters! Ambassador Sharma noted that when he visited Ethiopia he was struck by how Indian many Ethiopians looked and how Ethiopian some Indians look. Perhaps there is a common demographic and cultural zone stretching from the Sahel and Sahara on the shores of the Atlantic through western Asia to South Asia, I suggested half-jokingly. Perhaps they are Chris Ehret's *Afrisans*.

Dr. Pathak and Sandipani came by the hotel a little after 7:00 p.m. without the graduate student I had been expecting. We quickly settled the bill on their services and expenditures and Dr. Pathak gave me the itinerary and contacts for the next legs of my trip to Mumbai and Hyderabad. He is still working on contacts for Bangalore. I asked him to thank Professor Dubey for me. We agreed that I would contact Dr. Pathak if I needed further assistance.

As I packed, it occurred to me that this visit, like the one in Madrid, has been too brief. I was leaving just as I was beginning to get into the groove. That's the trouble with such a global project. At best one can only scratch the surface. I consoled myself with the books and materials I had acquired. Today I bought two rare books on the African diaspora in India, which I would probably not have gotten if I hadn't come. And, of course, I have learned a lot from the scholars I have talked to. What more could one wish for?

June 11, 2009

On the flight from Delhi to Mumbai I tried to sleep for having woken up so early. As usual when I have such an early morning flight, I didn't sleep as well as I would have liked. The alarm went off at 5:00 a.m. and I was in the lobby paying my bill twenty minutes later. The bill was somewhat of a shocker—the room tax was about 20%! This added \$300 more than I had originally estimated.

The streets were empty at that time of morning, which made for a much quicker ride to the airport. The driver was the quiet type and that suited me at that time of day. But he couldn't resist pointing to the construction of the Metro site of the new airport, expected to be ready by the time of the Commonwealth Games next year. To most people the Metro is a symbol of India's modernization and coming-of-age, economically.

The departure lounge seemed a lot more pleasant than the arrivals, or perhaps it was too early for me to be judgmental. I resisted the temptation to get breakfast—surely, this was not the U.S. so they would probably feed us on the flight. I was right and it was a full breakfast to boot! I almost missed the flight, for I couldn't make out the announcements. I realized something was wrong when it was 6:40 a.m. and I asked an airline attendant and he told me to hurry. Earlier, in line for check-in, I encountered the language problem from a different angle, or so I thought. The man behind me asked me something in Hindu or a language that was clearly not English. He repeated a couple of times and I just shook my head. So I could pass for an Indian, I wondered, smiling to myself. It's been hard talking to taxi drivers because of mutual incomprehension.

The Air India airbus from Paris via Delhi to Mumbai was half empty. Behind me, someone was happily stretched out and asleep for much of the flight. Save for a few

pockets of turbulence, it was a good flight. Descent into the airport offered a full display of Mumbai's unsettling contradictions—skyscrapers and shanties side by side. The airport itself, like Delhi's, wore its age, in some places quite well in others less successfully. I got a prepaid taxi ticket, which was almost double that in Delhi. Ninety minutes later, I understood why; that's how long it took from the airport to the hotel. It wasn't just the distance, but the traffic, which was so heavy that in several places we just crawled. The taxi was supposed to be air-conditioned, but it felt like we were driving in a furnace.

It was all there, Mumbai in its aspirational and squalid grandeur—the four-lane highways that turned into three, then two, and back to three lanes, although the constantly honking cars followed no lanes as they zigzagged to overtake each other; the motor rickshaws, motorcycles with passengers clinging to each other without helmets; and pedestrians who took every opportunity to outrun the traffic; not to mention the overcrowded buses and vans, some emblazoned with ads for the latest Bollywood movies. There were the tall buildings under construction screaming their way into the sky; the new glass buildings gleaming in the hot air; old decrepit buildings whose painted and concrete walls had turned into hideous gray and black; the endless hovels out of which peeped skinny bodies side by side with street bazaars of fresh and processed foodstuffs and other subsistence products for the various gradations of the poorer classes; and there were the agonizing sights of forgotten people sleeping on benches, women and children clinging to desperate livelihoods on the sidewalks and scrawny men picking through the garbage dumps. As we came closer to the hotel, the trees of Delhi reappeared, the crowds became more diverse as the well-to-do people joined the poorer people, the kiosks competed with upmarket shops, and the billboards proclaimed national and transnational brands of consumption, not just the local fare of restaurants, but travel services, and assorted products and services, often in Hindi.

The taxi driver mistakenly took me to the Taj Mahal Hotel that was the scene of the terrorist bombing last year. The security was tight with guards and metal detectors. I had to get another taxi to the Taj President where I was booked. It had little of the grandeur of the Taj Mahal Hotel in New Delhi, at least as far as the lobby was concerned. And I was not upgraded to the Executive Floor. The room was elegant with its modern floors and fine fixtures and paintings, but nothing like in New Delhi. It felt much better, as there were none of the fawning butlers. The restaurant where I went to eat lunch also looked ordinary. And there were a lot of people, Indians and whites. I felt at home. Above all, I could walk outside into the busy streets, which I did for more than an hour. This could be anywhere in Africa, I thought, certainly cities like Addis Ababa with their juxtaposition of extreme wealth and appalling poverty, luxurious apartments on one side of the street and shacks on the other made out of flimsy materials and stuck on abandoned boats, or fine restaurants adjacent to vendors cooking and selling food beside the road. I didn't seem to attract any glances or curiosity that I was aware of, as I walked towards a rocky beach and back. After returning to the hotel, I ordered dinner. It was brought on a plate and not a table with all the fanfare of a butler. And the food was delicious. I felt at home.

June 12, 2009

Clearly, it was a good idea to wake up and check e-mail before getting out of bed. This "crackberry" habit is particularly tempting when I'm away from home, lonely, and in

need of the intimacies of communication. The messages I value the most and I am most concerned about are those family members—Cassandra, Natasha, Mwai, the old man, Moza, the immediate family, then the extended family, and friends. Those about work and colleagues can always wait, unless, as this morning, my well-being might be affected. I read an e-mail from the Office of Social Science Research that I wouldn't be receiving a reimbursement for my ticket purchase until I returned to Chicago. I wasn't too amused by the news and responded accordingly.

The breakfast helped to calm me down. It was a buffet, another improvement, in my book, over New Delhi's Executive Floor fare. And there were a lot of people including families, mostly Indians, several with American or British accents—the diaspora back to enjoy the delights of the homeland.

The rest of the day went much better than the brief e-mail moment when my disappointment with UIC welled up and threatened to mess up my mood. In the late morning, I took a taxi to the University of Mumbai. Professor Biswas had warned me to reserve enough time because of traffic. She was right. It was a great ride despite the heat and all that honking and being rear-ended once. We drove through different parts of this sprawling city which gave me a much better sense of its enormous size and astonishing variety. As we drove, I was intrigued, as usual, by the street scenes. Trying to strike up a conversation with the driver proved difficult. We could hardly understand each other, so much for the bonds of English. From Dadabhai Naoroji Road we went through the picturesque Marine Drive that reminded me of Lakeshore Drive in Chicago and a similar road in Cape Town whose name I can't remember; then we drove through Pedder Road, to Veer Savarkar Road, to Sitladevi Temple Road and Lady Jamshedji Road before joining the airport road and branching into Kalina, which took us to the university. What I saw yesterday was amplified in slower motion, for the traffic was heavy and we were often reduced to a crawl. There was the squalid Mumbai and the chic Mumbai; the enduring, congested and decrepit old city and the emerging gleaming, proud and prosperous new city, side by side or on different roads, sometimes coexisting peacefully or competing for supremacy.

It took us about two hours to get to the university. I hadn't been given any directions to the Centre for African Studies so we stopped a couple of times to ask for directions. But that didn't seem to help much. Concerned about the meter which was still running, which was left running during our minor accident, and which I couldn't quite make out, I asked the driver to let me out. The meter read 1,790, but he asked me for 270 rupees, to my enormous relief. In the first building I walked to, which looked like part of the school of education, nobody could help. I was luckier at the library. I waited until the librarian had attended to the people ahead of me who were returning or checking out books—surprisingly all done by hand with no computer in sight—before asking for directions. Fortunately, it was only a few minutes away. I was getting anxious about the time, for I didn't want to be late for my lecture. At the next building where I thought the Centre was, I was given a bit of a run-around, either to wrong floors or to wrong buildings. By the time I found the Centre, it was just before 2:30 p.m., the scheduled time for my lecture. Professor Biswas was standing in front of the Centre, a wide smile breaking out on her face. She welcomed me warmly as I apologized for making her and her colleagues wait. She took me to her office where she introduced me to some of her colleagues and gave me a much needed and appreciated glass of water.

The lecture was held in an air-conditioned room in the history department, a block away. It was well attended. Professor Biswas gave a gracious and generous introduction.

The lecture was well received with lots of insightful questions. Professor J.S. Naik, a former head of the Department of History, who presided over the lecture, went over the top in his compliments, calling it not simply brilliant but paradigm-shifting, and he expressed deep regret that it had not been delivered in the main auditorium for faculty and students to hear. It was such a rare, profound presentation, conceptually rigorous, presented with unusual command and humility, he said. The director of the Centre, Renu Modi, joked they hadn't heard me speak before so they didn't want to take chances by getting a much bigger venue! A reception of tea, coffee and snacks followed and then Professor Biswas insisted we take more pictures.

In the questions and comments that were made, the importance of comparative diaspora studies was stressed, that students of African and Indian diasporas had a lot to learn from each other. It was indeed critical to define diasporas more clearly, they agreed with me, for the term *diaspora* had become highly loaded, politicized even. They seemed impressed with my knowledge of the African diasporas in India. It was pointed out that India has indeed been at the crossroads of many migrations and civilizations. Some of the peoples who came into India, such as the Greeks and Persians, were assimilated; others such as the Turks and Mughals were accommodated. Undoubtedly, Prof. Naik insisted, India is a multicultural society in which you find peoples of different origins, races, and cultures including Africans.

Renu kindly offered to drive me back. She lived in the direction of where I was going. She had a driver and we sat in the back. I know in many African countries people have house workers, but drivers too! I was a little surprised. She decided to show me parts of Mumbai before taking me to her house for a cup of tea and to meet her family. You can't leave without seeing how Indians live, she said. I thought that was generous and I immediately liked her. It turned out that we also knew several people in common: Steve Sharra who attended a conference at her center a few months ago, Fantu Cheru, the late Chachage and his wife Demeri. About each she told me endearing stories of how she had met them—Chachage and Demeri, for example, when they were having difficulty crossing a street in the city! She approached them and gave them a ride. She has been to several African countries for research, including Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Mauritius. She even stopped at Lilongwe airport in Malawi en route to Zambia on her current project on medical tourism from Africa to India. She has also been working on African-Indian economic relations, on which she will soon be publishing a book with Sage Publications. Her first book was on African refugees, which she wrote before she got her PhD in African Studies at JNU.

A lively woman who could be mistaken for a Somali or an Ethiopian, her fascination with Africa and commitment to African studies was evident and infectious. She couldn't let me go without visiting her house, she said, because people she meets in Africa are always kind to her and they take her to their houses. We first went to what she said was the most expensive part of Mumbai, Pali Hill, with its sumptuous houses and expensive apartments in treed lots where celebrities and the moneyed elites live. It showed. We stopped by an old Christian church, which she likes to visit, although she is not Christian, she was quick to add. There were several people in the church praying individually on their knees. The iconography of the white Jesus, Mary, and other biblical figures looked as discordant with the Indian worshippers as it does across Africa in Christian churches, except of course in Ethiopia, Egypt, and in Afrocentric and independent churches where such images have been appropriately domesticated. From the church, we drove by the beach, still in Pali Hill, and Renu pointed to a house where she lived for a while with her sister who has since moved to Europe—I can't remember what country she said it was.

She pointed to several residences of well-known film stars and other celebrities. In front of one, a crowd was gathered waiting for the star to appear and wave at them.

As we were leaving Pali Hill, she stopped by a grocery store to buy fruits and vegetables for the kids. Whenever I have a chance in foreign countries, I like to check grocery stores and compare prices, but I didn't this time. When we got to her house, we ran into her youngest daughter at the elevator going out with the nanny. She was shy, as most seven-year-olds are, and wouldn't shake my hand as she ran with the nanny. The thirteen-year-old was quite different. As her mother prepared masala tea, she kept me company. She seemed utterly comfortable talking about school, the subjects she liked, and that she wants to become a lawyer. We also talked about the countries she had been to with her parents, from France to Sweden, Switzerland, and Mauritius. She seemed bright and adorable. It was clear that mother and daughter are very close; they often gang up against dad, they both said with an engaging laugh. I couldn't help bringing Natasha as a teenager in the conversation. Renu's husband, a senior civil servant, came in before I was about to leave. She had told me earlier, almost conspiratorially with her daughter, that he felt uncomfortable whenever she traveled to Africa, not just for her safety, but out of jealousy. They both laughed.

On her trips to Africa, what she found quite intriguing was the attitude of the Indian diaspora. In Kenya, they were adamantly Kenyan even if their fellow Kenyans didn't seem to think so and still regarded them as *dukawalas*, as foreign shopkeepers. They certainly didn't seem to identify with or want to identify with India. South Africans of Indian descent—ISAs as they call them here—also seemed to have the same attitude. Remittances from these Indian Africans were quite negligible. We both seemed to think it probably reflected the duration and insecurities of their diaspora status. Many were descendants of indentured laborers sent to work on plantations and build the transport infrastructure from the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite their longevity in these countries, they are often regarded as non-natives, so their status as national citizens is often precarious, which makes strong identification with India potentially dangerous. Perhaps also given their social origins as descendants of indentured laborers, they thought Indians looked down upon them. This seemed to have echoes with the Afro-Atlantic diasporas of enslavement and the relationship between them and Africans. There was a difference, however, she observed, with the Indian diaspora in Mauritius which, while constituted out of indentured labor, maintained active linkages with India. This is largely because they are politically dominant in Mauritius.

If levels of engagement from the diaspora to the homeland partly reflect the political status of the diaspora in its host land, could we expect enhanced forms of U.S. and African-American engagement following the election of President Obama? I observed in response to a question after a lecture I gave on African Americans and Pan-Africanism at Rutgers University that before civil rights and decolonization, African-American political activism was framed by internal struggles for civil rights and external struggles for African independence. The attainment of independence in Africa and civil rights in the U.S. recast the political terrain of engagement—weakened it in some cases—as the language of common struggle was eroded, but also pluralized it, in that it now encompassed state actors on both sides. The Obama presidency caps the rise of African Americans as state actors and opens new avenues for Pan-Africanism. At the lecture, many people were quite interested in discussing the rise of Obama and its implications for African diasporas and the world at large. As it happened, when we were driving to her house, Renu called an

Indian Zambian woman I had met together with her husband in Leipzig. She told her I should give Renu my paper delivered in Leipzig, which was excellent, she said.

Renu and her daughter walked me out. She kindly asked the driver to drop me at the hotel. The traffic on N.M. Joshi Road and Patton Road was as heavy as ever, so were the crowds, but I paid less attention than before as I reflected on the various conversations at the lecture and with Renu. By then the stomach pains I had felt when I woke up in the morning had completed disappeared; I had taken two tablets of Imodium before I left for the university. But the morning e-mail drama came back. I found an apologetic message from Ebony, which was later followed by another from her immediate boss, Francesca Gaia, assuring me that all would be done to expedite my reimbursement. When I got back to the hotel, I decided to go to one of the restaurants and treat myself to a nice meal. In the corridor, I ran into a group of young Indian Americans—at least it seemed so from their accent. Every second word out of their mouth seemed to be “shit” this, “fuck” that. Surely, the homeland can do without such cultural imports from the diaspora. To my relief, when I went into the restaurant the linguistically challenged diasporans were nowhere in sight. I enjoyed my food and the politeness of the “native” waiters with greater appreciation.

When I returned to the room, I attended to ASA matters. I responded to the long e-mail from Chuck Ambler, my successor as ASA President, and contacted Carol Martin saying that I would be able to participate in today’s scheduled Executive Committee meeting. I waited to get confirmation that she would make the conference call at 2:00 EST and 11:30 here. In the meantime, and between watching TV, Natasha and I exchanged text messages. Parenting never ends! The message or call from Carol never came.

June 13, 2009

Renu came to pick me up a little after noon. She wanted to show me around the city and take me to places I could do some shopping. While I had not planned to do any shopping yet—I would have preferred to do it perhaps on the last day in Bangalore—I decided to take advantage of her offer. I told her I was interested in kurtas and perhaps I could get something for the wife and daughter. One shop was enough and we spent a whole half hour! I got myself two kurtas, dresses for Cassandra, and earrings for Natasha; I stopped taking chances on buying Natasha clothes more than ten years ago, although I cannot resist the temptation from time to time. It was an upscale store, which meant no bargaining, but the prices seemed reasonable, at least in dollar terms—a whopping \$150.

From the store, she took me to the downtown campus of the University of Mumbai, where some of the main administrative offices are, including that of the vice-chancellor and one of the libraries. More than one hundred years old, the campus is a colonial replica of Oxford, although the buildings look much older than that. The library was open and we entered briefly. The grounds are immaculately kept with flowers and well-trimmed hedges. All in all, an eminent seat of knowledge that seems obliviously quiet from the hustle and bustle of the city around. We drove to other important landmarks in the neighborhood, all within a few kilometers of the hotel, including the Mumbai High Court, one of the oldest in the country housed in an imposing building of gothic revival and early English style. Then we drove past the more modernist Mumbai Stock Exchange, the largest stock exchange in South Asia and the twelfth largest in the world.

Renu had come in her sister's car, as the family car was with her husband who had taken their elder daughter for classes. After driving for a while, she thought it was time for the driver to have lunch and for us also to have a bite. I had told her I didn't feel like a whole meal since I had eaten a late breakfast. We found a restaurant catering to young people who competed in multitasking—talking to each other and on their cell phones. Fortunately, we found a quiet little corner on the first floor. She ordered a vegetarian dish, which we shared. And I treated myself to a mango lassi. As we ate, I learned a little more about the state of African studies in India. Renu discussed the state of African studies in India, which I found fascinating for some of the apparent parallels with African studies in the United States. African studies in India did not of course have similar epistemic, racial and ideological divisions, but the unequal and sometime troubled relationship between senior and junior scholars seemed comparable. It sounded so familiar, the hierarchies, insecurities, and pettiness of academic culture. I could have mentioned similar Africanists in the U.S. and Canada where the situation is further complicated by the dynamics of race and nationality, certainly when it comes to how they often treat junior African academics. She concluded on a positive note that other younger academics and officials in the Ministry of External Affairs have wised up to the machinations of these gatekeepers and she has been able to get research grants and organize conferences and attended the India-Africa Summit on the merits of her work. She has fully returned to her academic work after ten years of concentrating on raising her daughters.

They dropped me off at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum of western India where I spent the rest of my afternoon. Currently undergoing renovations, the museum incorporates various Indian architectural styles and British infusion, a style known as Indo-Saracemic. The grounds are covered by a beautiful garden of palm trees and flowers. I got myself an audio guide that turned out to be quite good and informative as I went around the three floors. On the first floor were Indian sculptures from various periods and what were called *Indian Pre and Proto history*, which I found deeply problematic in its depiction of the human evolutionary process: Africa was almost invisible, and what would be regarded today as false Eurocentric chronologies were given—Neanderthal man even got more highlights than all the archaeological and genuine discoveries of the last three decades or so. Quite shameful and inexcusable, I thought. One look at the natural history section and I walked out—I don't fancy birds that much, which are featured in the entrance section. The first floor was far more interesting, if only because of my ignorance I had little way of making judgments. One side showed miniature paintings from different eras and Indian civilizations and the other, Nepalese and Tibetan art. There were also more specialized galleries named after their patrons on Krishna art, for example.

The second floor housed Japanese and other east Asian art, a large hallway, broken up by stairs, of some awful European art, mostly portraits and naturalistic scenes, from the collections of two Tatas—Ratan and Dorab—both of whom were knighted, from the famous family of tycoons who have been at the center of Indian industry and business since the late nineteenth century. The art was bequeathed to the museum in 1921 and 1933 after Ratan and Dorab's respective deaths. There was also a section on arms and armor, which I found more interesting than I would have imagined. I was intrigued by the fact that the history of spears, bows and arrows in human warfare has been much longer than for all subsequent generations of weapons beginning with guns. Technological advancement has been retrogressive for humanity in this one area. Those ancient weapons

killed far fewer people than modern weapons, not to mention the threat of human annihilation posed by nuclear weapons. The case for nuclear disarmament has always been compelling, but it is rank hypocrisy for today's nuclear powers to demand others to forgo nuclear weapons while they hold on to their stockpiles. No country should have such weapons, period. That means the nuclear powers, declared and undeclared, should dismantle their nuclear arsenals, and those that don't have them should forswear from acquiring them. This is the only bargain that makes sense. In fact, that is the stipulation and expectation of the ineffectual nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

After leaving the museum I tried to walk to the hotel, but gave up when I had no clue where I was going. I swallowed my pride and need for exercise by getting a taxi after I found myself walking in a circle. For dinner, I tried the Thai restaurant in the hotel. Compared to last night's Indian food, it failed to measure up. Tomorrow I will go back to the Indian restaurant. After all, I am in India. Besides Indian food, together with West African food—at least that which I have eaten on many occasions, primarily Senegalese and Nigerian—is for me among the best food in the world.

June 14, 2009

This was an incredibly long day and even a little adventurous. The driver of the hired vehicle facilitated by Renu came to pick me up at 5:00 a.m. Only research can make me wake up this early, despite all my curses, of course. Renu suggested it was best to leave early to avoid traffic for the journey to Murud, which could take up to five hours, one way. Murud is the historical site of the Siddis of Janjira and the Janjira fort, one of India's most impressive forts that was never conquered by various Indian and European armies.

She was right. The roads were eerily deserted, so much that the driver didn't seem to pay any attention to the red traffic lights, which he crossed with abandon. The result was that we crossed old Mumbai in no time and we were soon in new Mumbai with its massive apartment complexes and office towers. As we left Mumbai altogether and entered the countryside, it all began to look so familiar, from the landscape to the vegetation to the people to the markets. Except for the intrusive road signs and the names of the shops and the ubiquitous Tata ads, we could have been driving in rural Kenya or Malawi, or anywhere in east and southern Africa. The multilane highway from Mumbai gave way to two lanes as we negotiated our way up and down the denuded and forested hills and along the sea. The vegetation shifted from lush to sparse; arid shrubs to coastal palms. But the sight of what people were doing was the most jolting: the women especially, some barefoot, walking with baskets, metal containers or logs of wood on their heads; dusty, half-naked children running around; and men lazing around or doing all types of repair work in front of their homes or shops. The market scenes were equally familiar, the scope of the merchandise, the shape of the stalls, the mannerisms of the vendors standing or sitting and gently and loudly beckoning customers. There were mangoes, which, on our way back I wanted to buy so badly, but the woman refused to sell anybody less than three dozen. And there were the women squatting trying to sell shrimp and small fish covered with flies. The shops in the small towns and villages we drove past were quite recognizable as well, so was the mosaic of scattered, ostentatious houses and concentrated drab dwellings; dilapidated buildings and the occasional resort in the hills and along the sea; houses of worship, mostly

colorful Hindu temples and the sporadic mosque; and symbols of state power including police stations, post offices, schools, and clinics. From the cool comfort of the air-conditioned SUV, it was a pleasant ride notwithstanding the constant overtaking, honking, and near misses along the narrow roads snaking through the towns and villages.

I only realized how searingly hot it was after we arrived at Kolaba fort in Alibag. From the edges of the sea, which was at low tide, we took a wagon pulled by two donkeys, for which we paid 150 rupees for the two kilometer ride to the fort. It was built in part to provide defense from the Siddis of Janjira. Inside the fort is a large enclosed pool where we found dozens of Indian boys swimming, a Ganesha temple, and several ruins of other buildings. Several families still seem to live there and there was also a police station.

From Kolaba fort we drove to Murud. As we reached the bare hill facing the sea, Janjira fort suddenly appeared in all its imposing and impregnable majesty, reinforced by the gentle white waves. The fort was built by Malik Ambar, the great Abyssinian general and later a ruler in his own right, in the sixteenth century. Other accounts say it was constructed by Siddi Burkhan Khan in 1571. Whatever the case, the fort remained with the Siddis for centuries despite efforts to conquer it by the Maratha Empire and later the Portuguese and the English. Standing up to 40 feet high, it has retained its exterior grandeur despite daily lashes from the sea around it for hundreds of years. The only way to get to the fort is by boat from the shore. I almost freaked out: the boat was packed and there were no safety belts, seats, or life-saving devices, and the edge was only a few meters above the water. Supposed it capsized, I said to myself. The sailors had nothing better than long bamboo sticks and a weathered mast they periodically adjusted.

Going in and out of the unmotored boat was equally unceremonious and unsafe: it involved jumping in and out of the unanchored contraption. For such a major national landmark and attraction I thought the Indian government could do better, a feeling that intensified when we made it inside, which has not been well kept at all, certainly not compared to the monuments I saw in New Delhi. Despite the poor state of the ruins, it was clear this was a well-designed fortress. Built over 22 acres of land, the fort contains nearly 20 rounded arches, which had canons mounted on them, and a few still do. There are several residences, including a palace as well as a mosque and two large pools that are disgustingly green and filled with plastic bottles and other debris. We walked up to the tower that gives a commanding view of the entire bay and the Arabian Sea. It was so hot that I happily gulped water being sold in cups by a shade. Bottled water could wait. Fresh groundwater is available, by a miracle of nature, inside the fort, as is the case inside Kolaba fort.

The fort was packed with visitors, mostly Indians. Either people are not used to seeing too many foreign tourists or it is a testimony to India's multiculturalism that several times I was asked if I was from India. The fact that I didn't understand a word of what one of the sailors said about the fort as we approached it, or saw the need to follow the guide explaining the history of the fort in Hindi, was both gratifying and dissatisfying; gratifying to see Indians speaking to each other about their history and making no concessions to any foreign tourist in their midst, and dissatisfying for me personally and my hunger to hear how the history of the fort was presented. The driver I had come with was of no help, for it became clear from the moment he picked me up that we would not be able to communicate much. I had asked Prof. Dubey who had asked Prof. Biswas for a translator to accompany me on such trips. Prof. Biswas hadn't managed to organize anything beyond the lecture and meeting at Mumbai University. Thank God, I had met Renu who had since tried to step up to the plate without too much advance notice.

On the way back, we stopped by a nice little restaurant in Alibag. Ordering the food proved a little challenging since the driver and I could barely communicate, nor did the waiters seem to understand what I was saying. Pointing always helps in the end, the power of body language, I guess. When I was brought an English-Hindu menu, I pointed to the chicken, lamb, and rice biryani dishes. The driver ordered some Indian bread. We smiled at each other as we ravaged the delicious meal. We were clearly both very hungry; it was several hours since we left Mumbai. It was fascinating watching people in the restaurant: the young couple on an apparent date who whispered fondly to each other; the four men beside us who gorged and licked their fingers with abandon; the husband and wife with their moody, overweight teenage daughter who hoarded a mountain of food; the three women in their expensive saris who seemed to frown on the place and walked upstairs to the air-conditioned room where the food was more expensive. After eating, the waiter brought bowls of warm water and lemon to wash our hands. The meal cost less than half a snack at the hotel.

Going back took even longer because of heavy traffic when we reached new Mumbai. I dozed on and off part of the way until the jostling of cars on the highway removed any lingering sleep I may have had. The driver was adept at overtaking and seizing any opening on the multilane highway from new to old Mumbai. Haphazard driving seemed to add two or more new arbitrary lanes. By the time we got back to the hotel, I was exhausted and relieved. I paid the agreed fee of 5,000 rupees and gave the driver a tip, which he didn't seem to expect and appeared quite pleased with. I wished we had been able to talk to each other a lot more. A short, skinny man, I managed to gather the fact that he was 29, married but with no children. I gathered information in the restaurant by discreetly pointing to other people! This has come as a real surprise; I expected a much easier time conversing with ordinary people in English as one would expect in an African former British colony. This might mean English fluency has a greater class dimension than in Anglophone Africa.

Having seen one of their great legacies at Janjira fort, I was anxious now to meet the descendants of the Siddis in Mumbai. The question was, how. I felt a little betrayed by my two principal contacts. There was no point in steaming, so I bought Internet time for the first time since coming to Mumbai to catch up on my usual online papers. CNN and the BBC had become repetitive with their stories about the rigged elections in Iran. Perhaps if I get a handle on the story I will write a blog.

June 15, 2009

Renu came to my rescue. She actually woke me up, but I didn't mind when I heard she had plans for me to go to Dongri, the center of the Siddi community in Mumbai where we would be visiting the Bava Gor dargah, the spiritual and cultural hub of the community. I quickly got out of bed, took a shower and went to have breakfast. The vegetarian dishes looked like a full lunch or dinner meal, but as usual, I stuck to the breakfast fare I am used to, fruits, a muffin, omelet, and coffee.

Renu and her driver came at 10:00 a.m., as agreed. Dongri is a congested part of old Mumbai with old dilapidated shops, narrow streets, and frenzied activity. This is the heart of the informal economy, Renu said, where goods and services touch ground and touch the ordinary people invisible in cosmopolitan, corporate Mumbai. Many of the

trading houses and shops belong to Gujarat businessmen, some of whose compatriots established businesses in colonial East Africa. She pointed to the names, some of which one sees regularly in East Africa.

We found Ashuma Siddi Habib, the woman who looks after the *dargah* inside. The *dargah* serves both as a spiritual center and her home. Wearing a blue dress and a red and green shawl that covered her head, she was sitting on a patch of plastic covering the color of wooden tiles. Behind her was a bundle of bedding neatly folded. The rest of the room had black and white tiles. It was a large room, which led to a smaller room behind green door frames where lay large drums, bull-horns, rattles and other musical instruments and religious objects. There was also a rostrum made of what appeared to be white marble, on top of which was placed an object covered in a bright, multicolored cloth. In front of the rostrum were inscriptions in Arabic. The green table in front of the rostrum also had Arabic inscriptions. Behind this religious sanctuary was the kitchen, also spacious, with a stove and utensils. There were two fans running, one in the front room the other in the back room.

A woman in her late 70s with big bright eyes, Ashuma had unmistakable African features. She had a strong, smoky voice and seemed easily given to laughter. I took an immediate liking to her. You are my countryman, she said, as I sat down; we have the same blood, she continued pointing to the veins in her arms. What about me, Renu told me she asked her. We're both Indians, she replied, but he is my blood. I thought she poignantly captured the diasporic condition and identity, the duality of national citizenship and imaginary affinity. What a pity I could not talk directly to her. Renu, who is an experienced ethnographer and has done a lot of research in poor communities, had suggested we avoid a formal interview. People only open up once they get to know who you are and when they come to trust you. So we had, or rather Renu carried on, an introductory conversation with her. Only occasionally would she translate. I could tell they got along quite well, for there was a lot of laughter and warmth.

She got married in Mumbai. Her husband has a business and two wives. She is clearly an important figure in the community, the keeper of the *dargah*. Two of her grandchildren sat with us and a third amused himself in another corner, combing his hair and polishing his shoes. I asked the kids, aged between six and ten, to write me their names for me, which they did—Siddi Abdul Razah, Siddi Shamira, Siddi Abdul Gaffar. When we went to the side room with the religious and musical instruments, Razah played the drums as his grandmother played the rattles. Initially shy, Shamira quickly warmed up to me and whenever our eyes met, she would smile. Their mother soon joined us. None of them would be mistaken for foreigners in Malawi. The mother would throw occasional glances at me as she joined the lively conversation between Renu and her mother-in-law. Several men went in and out but didn't join us at any point.

The Siddis of Mumbai are generally poor. Some estimates say there may be 3,000 in Mumbai. Mama Ashuma, well that's what I would call her, said there were a hundred Siddi families in the city. They marry among themselves. There are a lot of intermarriages among the Siddis of Mumbai and Gujarat where there is a sizeable Siddi community. Many Siddis in Mumbai are engaged in low-skilled jobs in recycling, as motor mechanics, shop assistants, garbage pickers, railway workers and workers in call centers. They are fully integrated in Indian society and culture. In different parts of the country, some Siddis are also Hindu and Christian. At one point, when Renu left to get her wallet from the car, Mama Ashuma asked me if I were Muslim. I shook my head no, that I am Christian.

She didn't follow up, and I wasn't sure whether I should follow up either in English. Renu later explained that the Siddi Muslims like those of Dongri, have a rather eclectic Sufi culture, which makes them quite tolerant of other Muslims and other religions.

Mama Ashuma smiled when she narrated that many Africans come to see them. There is a hotel nearby where Africans stay. She is always happy to see them. Some leave money. Her expression darkened when she talked about the white researchers who come to interview her and leave, promising all sorts of things and nothing happens. One promised to send money for children's education. Several names were mentioned, including Amy Catlin and Helen Basu who are apparently the happy exceptions.

As we talked, she asked the grandchildren to bring albums, magazines, and news cuttings where they have been featured. One was *Jet Wings* from February 2004, the other *Time Out Mumbai* from December 1–14, 2006. Renu asked the children to go and get photocopies. Razah was in one of the pictures with a drum and his mother was in another holding rattles, while another woman was at the drums. The articles all noted that the Siddis have been in India for a very long time, going back to the twelfth century. They are fully integrated into Indian society in terms of food, language and other cultural practices, although they try to keep their distinctive identity through some of their rituals, music, and dance. Once prominent—one story noted they actually ruled Mumbai for a short period in the seventeenth century—they are now generally poor but immensely proud of their heritage, which they trace to Gori Pir, an Abyssinian trader who is said to have pioneered African migrations to India. According to one version of the story, he came to India on a holy mission to vanquish a demon. He was later followed by his brothers Bava Habash, and his sister, Mai Mishra. The second version states that Gori Pir was a pious agate traveler who invented the craft of making agate beads. Gori Pir serves as the symbolic figure head of the Siddis.

Other Siddis believe they are descendants of Hazrat Bilal, the African connected to Islam who became the trusted companion of Prophet Mohammed and Islam's first *muezzin*. The controversy about the origins of the Siddi is also reflected in their name. One version claims it is a corruption of *sayyid* or *sayyadi*, Arabic for "master," either because they became rulers or they worked for rulers, another that the name refers to a community in Ethiopia among the Sidama people, also called *Siddi* or *Sidi* or *Side*. The first Africans, the Habshi, are said to have come as early as the eighth century with Muslim armies. Others came in subsequent centuries as sailors, merchants, servants, and slaves. The Siddis, who are distinct from the Habshi, although today people of African descent in India are generally known as Siddis, also arrived from east Africa, particularly during the period of Portuguese ascendancy when many were brought as slaves.

Today the Siddi population is divided into recognized, "scheduled tribes" or professional castes. There are royal Siddis descended from rulers of former Siddi states and principalities in Jafarabad, Hyderabad, Aurangabad, Randhanpur in North Gujarat, and Sachin. In some instances they have adopted "tribal" names such as Tai of Saurashtra, the Shemali of Jambur, the Kafara of Diu, and the Saheli of Daman; or names of traditional Indian castes including Siddi Langa for musicians, Siddi Dhobi for washermen, and Siddi Kharwa for sailors. The process of Siddi differentiation among themselves and from other Indian communities was facilitated in part by British colonial rule and its divisive politics.

Some of this information I got talking to Renu later or reading the materials she gave me the other day for my trip to Janjira. I also read an interesting essay by Abdulaziz Lodhi, which makes the interesting point that Siddi consciousness of their African identity is growing as more scholars study them and as they reestablish contacts with east Africa and

the wider world through cultural tours. An unfortunate result of increasing western scholarly interest in them is the wrong-headed and inaccurate emphasis on their slave origins, an exaggeration that the Siddis themselves are embracing, which is leading to the reconstruction of their history in which they emphasize, wrongly, Zanzibar as their ancestral home and Somali as their ancestral language. I caught glimpses of this in Mama Ashuma's discussion in which she said her ancestors are from Zanzibar.

Before we left the dargah, Mama Ashuma offered to bless us. She had done so when she took us around the sanctuary by slapping a flywhisk on the head and the back and the shoulders. After she did that the first time, she gave me a rose petal to eat, which I did with great difficulty, although I tried not to show it. Renu gave me a hundred rupees to put in the green box by the rostrum. I had forgotten my wallet, although I had brought a credit card, which was of no use, of course, in these circumstances. I promised to refund Renu, who donated 500 INR, once we got back to the hotel. In fact, I gave her a thousand rupees to donate to the dargah next time she went there.

As we left the dargah, I was quite delighted we had come and that I had visited such an important site of Siddi culture in Mumbai and met Mama Ashuma, *Murjawarji*, as she is respectfully addressed, according to one of the newspaper cuttings. She gave me the sweetest smile, repeating that I was from her homeland, although India was her home. Homeland and home, another intriguing coupling of the diaspora condition and identity. I greeted the men outside the dargah who were busy fixing or selling things.

As we drove back, Renu talked about her work on the slum communities of Mumbai on behalf of a World Bank project, and the ways she gained the community's trust and got the Bank and the government to invest in new services—the provision of water and school transport for the slum kids. At the hotel, I invited her for a snack, as neither of us was hungry. I was impressed by her support and generosity, the fact that she skipped work to help with my research project. This level of generosity is an indictment on those of us in the Northern academies who are always too busy for colleagues. So impressed was I with her and her work that when I went to the room I e-mailed Ebrima Sall and Willy Mutuga to introduce her to their respective CODESRIA and Ford Foundation networks in west and east Africa. I also gave her Douglas Johnson's contact at James Currey as a possible publisher for her manuscript on medical tourism from east Africa to India. Her newest edited book, scheduled to come out this month from Sage, is *Beyond Relocation: The Imperialism of Sustainable Resettlement*.

As in Madrid and New Delhi, I felt my work in Mumbai had only begun. If I were younger, I would return to each of these places and spend a lot more time. In the evening, I decided to return to the Indian restaurant where I had eaten such a delicious dish of fish and a very tasty Indian bread. But I was not so lucky tonight: the fish curry I ordered and the bread the waiter recommended were not as tasty. But I have not changed my opinion about Indian food!

June 16, 2009

It was really a no-win situation. Either wake up very early to avoid traffic and wait for hours at the airport or leave the hotel late and risk the traffic. I chose the first option. The same driver I went with to Janjira picked me up at 6:30 a.m. and we were at the domestic airport, which is separate from the international airport, by 7:00 a.m.! There wasn't much to do in the relatively small airport; the departure lounge has a couple of

kiosks and looks like those dingy lounges for commuter flights at some U.S. airports. The only difference here was that the newspapers were free, and there were lots of them.

Hyderabad Airport and the drive to the hotel in the city center were a revelation. The airport is new; in fact, it is not fully completed. It is a beautiful airport, all glass and steel, airy and bright. The landscaping around the airport and the road from the airport with its islands of flower beds and trimmed hedges added to the sense of freshness. Indeed, there is construction everywhere for new offices, houses, apartments, even flyovers, all sprouting like mushrooms, filling up empty spaces or uprooted buildings of the old Hyderabad. Occasionally, slum dwellings and rugged walkways crept in, and as we got closer to the city center, crowds of assorted means, roadside dwellers, traffic congestion, manic honking, cluttered shops and street vendors reasserted themselves, but on a smaller scale than Mumbai. Closer to the hotel, located in the city center, it was all chic and clean and green. Madhu Dubey, my colleague at UIC, was probably right that of all the cities I was visiting I would probably find Hyderabad the most pleasant.

The hotel itself is nowhere near its Taj siblings in New Delhi and Mumbai where I stayed. Circular in shape, all the corridors of the four stories face the restaurant below and the fish pond tucked besides an artificial boulder. What the hotel lacks in ostentation, it more than makes up with striking Indian paintings. The staff is equally friendly.

When I got to the room, I realized I felt sleepy. I decided to beat it by trying to take a walk. The heat was so suffocating that twenty minutes later I took refuge in a newly completed mall and went around to cool off. I was surprised to see that even going into the mall, one had to go through a metal detector. I have never seen such tight security in public places as here. The mall had, or advertised, the impending opening of the usual suspects—European and American brand names fronted by alluring posters of Hollywood stars like Penélope Cruz. There was even a KFC, which seemed to be well patronized. One mall visit for less than half an hour offers little basis for any general observations, but I couldn't help thinking about the globalization of Euroamerican brands, the cosmopolitan draw of even such low quality chains like KFC on countries with much better cuisine and clothing like India.

I rushed back to the hotel to beat the heat. I resolved to go out in the late afternoon or early evening when, hopefully, it is cooler. But I didn't, hunkered down to write a blog instead. The website was down and I called Lanarpages, who quickly restored it. I wrote the lectures I gave at IIC and Mumbai University. I also posted an essay, first published in *Pambazuka*, that I had read and noted yesterday on the Siddi. Before I started working on the blog, I got in touch with Professor Rekha Pande at the University of Hyderabad, my contact in Hyderabad. She gave me names of two prominent Siddis in the city I could interview, and through them be introduced to other Siddis. I was unable to reach one, and for the other I talked to two of his sons a couple of times but we were not able to firm up an interview for today. A part of me was not too keen to do interviews today anyway. I needed some rest. But I couldn't imagine the whole evening doing nothing, so I opted to work on my blog, which would, in any case, help me reflect on what I have been learning on this trip to this incredible country.

June 17, 2009

My initial impressions were more than confirmed when I went to the University of Hyderabad almost 25 kilometers from the hotel. It was one huge construction site of

ultra-modern office blocks, apartments, shopping centers, car dealerships, gardens, and parks. The taxi driver, whose English was slightly comprehensible, pointed out that many were high-tech companies. Finally, I saw the much-trumpeted face of the new India, a rapidly developing India with its burgeoning corporate elite and middle classes investing and consuming their way to gated modernity, away from the bulk of their compatriots still stuck in the urban slums and rural poverty. The architecture was a brash mixture of the ubiquitous glass towers of business districts in global cities and subdued Indian styles.

Previously, the University of Hyderabad was on the outskirts of the city. No more. Along the road leading to the university are a string of other colleges and educational and research institutions. The campus itself is huge, encompassing more than 200 acres, large chunks of which are still wooded with two small lakes. It is a post-graduate institution established in 1974. Both the Department of History, to which Professor Pande belongs, and the Centre for Women's Studies, which she directs, are located in the School of Social Sciences. The taxi had to be inspected before we entered the campus and I was asked to sign a log book. After being misled a couple of times, I found Professor Pande in her office. She was talking to a student, who she promptly discharged before welcoming me warmly. She seemed genuinely pleased to see me. I learned in the course of our conversation that she has been to UIC at the invitation of Gayatri Reddy, who I didn't know is from Hyderabad and had given a talk in the Gender and Women's Studies department two or three years ago.

Also, she has been to several African countries, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria with her husband who works for an international organization that often takes him to Africa. The fact that we are both historians seemed to seal the bond. She showed me several of her publications and we talked about our respective research interests. She started in religious history before gravitating more to women's history. Among her books are *Religious Movements in Medieval India*, *Succession in the Delhi Sultanate*, and edited or co-authored monographs in gender studies, *Women in Nation Building: A Multi-Dimensional Perspective* and *Gender Issues in the Police*. She mentioned that she recently resigned as editor of *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. She has three sons, the oldest an IT engineer who works in Bowie, Maryland, which I mentioned is close to where my parents-in-law live, and the other two are twins. One is a medical student in China and the other an undergraduate student at a local university here. She noted in passing how competitive it is to get admission into Indian universities, no wonder more than 90,000 every year study abroad. In turn, I briefly talked about my family.

But I had come to talk to her about her research on the Siddis. A few years ago, she conducted a study of Hyderabad's Siddi women. Much of the research on the Siddi, she observed, has focused on men and this led us into a brief discussion on the andocentric biases of traditional historiographies in most parts of the world, which has changed in recent times with the emergence of feminist scholarship. For a relatively small community that has not been studied much in Indian historiography, the gender biases in studies of the Siddi have remained glaring until very recently. In fact, she is one of the few who has explicitly studied Siddi women. For a moment, she searched through her computer to find papers she had written on the subject and when she couldn't find any she looked through several disks, and then she checked several issues of her Centre's annual report until she found one that contains a summary of the project. Clearly not satisfied, she asked one of the history department's assistants to photocopy her chapter in the voluminous collection of proceedings, *The African Diaspora in Asia: Explorations on a Less Known Fact*

from a conference she participated in Goa in January 2006, which I had in fact planned to attend.

She began by saying there are about 2,000–3,000 Siddis in Hyderabad. They are concentrated in four areas: A.C. Guard, Eram Manzil, Zahra Nagar, and Barkas. Some of the early references to the Africans come from the Delhi sultanate in north India and talk about Queen Razia who, in her efforts to consolidate her power and counterbalance the power of the dominant Turkish nobility, relied on the Habshi. One Habshi in particular, Malik Jamal-ud-*dui* Yakut, was put in charge of the stables and became her constant companion, to the displeasure of the nobles. Chronicles written at the time, repeated in subsequent histories, stated or implied Malik was her lover. A Bollywood film has been made about her. For her as a feminist historian, Professor Pande said, she is more interested in the way Razia built and used power in which the Habshi played a role. The practice of using the Habshi as guards and soldiers spread in the Deccan from the sixteenth century. This is in fact the public memory among Siddis today, including those that she interviewed who believe that their ancestors came as soldiers and bodyguards, not slaves. In the paper, she goes into detail about the different sets of soldiers, the ways in which they initially came as soldiers, sailors, and slaves, although she thinks that in the sixteenth century, many came as slaves brought by the Portuguese from east Africa. She also goes into the familiar debate about the origins of the names Habshi and Siddi.

She noted that today the Siddi are fully acculturated to local Indian society whose ritual and cultural practices they adopted, and who have lost distinctive African cultural practices, except for music and dance, and hardly maintain connections to Africa. In Hyderabad, as in many parts of India, few people know anything about the Siddis, for they tend to be marginalized in terms of their socioeconomic status. A majority of Hyderabad Siddis claim they came from Yemen. In terms of phenotype, they have Negroid features and range in color from dark to wheat-brown.

The project she conducted was intended to capture the realities of the Siddis in Hyderabad and especially the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the women. Fifty women were selected from the four main Siddi localities 28 were married and 32 were single. The majority of the city's Siddis are Muslim and they speak Urdu and Telugu. Originally, many believed they spoke Arabic. Siddi families are patriarchal, so male authority is quite pronounced, although women play important roles in family circles as care givers and household managers and they are normally consulted about economic matters concerning their nuclear families. The patriarchal structures of Siddi families are partly framed by their lowly status and fragile economic circumstances. The men mostly work as car drivers and mechanics, electricians, vendors and salespeople, and musicians. In addition, the Siddi also seem to have appropriated some of the most patriarchal aspects and practices of Islam and Indian cultures. She gave the example that when she wanted to take photos of the women, there were objectors who said photography is not allowed in Islam, but the men and boys were only too eager to be photographed!

Professor Pande found out that the vast majority of the married women were married at age eighteen or younger, two were even as young as thirteen. Nearly two-thirds of the women were married to Siddi men and the rest to non-Siddi men. The latter phenomenon was more common among the younger women; only their mothers were married to Siddi men. Most did not have more than three children, although a few had up to six or seven. The number of children seemed to correlate with level of education, which was lower and even non-existent for the older women compared to the younger ones.

The findings centered on their attitudes to education and various cultural practices for the girls and unmarried women. All had attended some form of education, unlike their mothers who were largely illiterate, but few went beyond primary school, let alone high school; only one was in college. Nearly a third had dropped out due to economic and household pressures, including lack of money for education and the need to look after siblings and widespread apathy among parents, and some of the girls themselves about girls' education. They all believed women should marry at age eighteen or older and a majority supported dowry but opposed polygamy. Only one expressed reservations towards *purdha* (women's seclusion), and one opposed remarriage for widows. Marriage prospects seem to be changing for younger Siddi women because of the growing preference among Siddi men for lighter-skinned Deccan women and larger dowries, against which the darker-skinned Siddi women whose families cannot afford large dowries and cannot compete. In fact, fourteen women said dowry, seven said beauty, and one gave another reason for the causes of growing preference for exogamous marriages.

It was a fascinating story. Throughout the conversation, we kept being served drinks, water and coffee, and Indian snacks, including *somosas*. Then she took me out to introduce me to faculty in the History Department and the Center for the Study of the Indian Diaspora. The history faculty were all in the department's conference room going over admissions, which, they later explained to me, is complicated by affirmative action requirements. Unlike in the U.S. where *quotas* is a dirty word, here there are specific quotas for minorities and the disabled. Originally, when I was planning to write the proposal on affirmative action in the U.S., South Africa, and Brazil, which was later funded by the Ford Foundation (although Brazil was excluded), I had thought of including India.

I went around shaking hands with the eight or nine faculty members, three or four of whom were women. One had spent two years at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and we exchanged a few brief remarks about that. They asked me about my research and, in turn, I asked them about theirs. One of the women did Indian economic history in the eighteenth century and when I told her about my own study on African economic history she was taken aback that I looked at the entire continent. For a country as big as India and a continent whose distinctive national histories are better recognized than is the case for most African countries, the idea of an Asian history seems more complex, if not more contrived, than the idea of an African history. Although for Africa, the tendency is actually to study one or two countries and make continent-wide generalizations which are often superficial and untenable. After several of the faculty had left, I got into a stimulating conversation with Anindita Mukhopadhyay. She received her PhD from the University of London and she specializes on modern Indian history, modern western ideas, law and society, and society and culture. She has a forthcoming book from Oxford University Press, entitled *The Cultural Definition of the Legal Subject in Colonial Bengal*. Inevitably, Mahmood Mamdani's book, *Citizen and Subject*, came up and we discussed colonial constructions of political, civic and cultural identities. When I mentioned I knew Mamdani as well as his wife Mira Nair, who she and the others didn't know were married, the conversation shifted to cinema and diaspora and she mentioned several of Mira's films, some of which I had seen — *Mississippi Masala*, *Monsoon Wedding* — and she gave insightful analyses. Now clearly charged up, she turned to diasporic writing, both in terms of Indian diaspora writers and Indian writers who write for or are published in the diaspora, some of whom she vehemently disapproved. She accused some of them of merely cannibalizing Indian language literatures without acknowledgement, sometimes almost verbatim. It would be instructive, she said, to translate some of these novels from

English into Indian languages and the literary plagiarism would be evident for all to see. Professor Pande decided to stop her clearly younger, intellectually passionate colleague, saying we needed to go to the Center for the Study of Indian Diaspora. They all expressed hope that I would return and give a seminar.

Professor Pande was right. Some of the faculty who had been expecting us at the Center had left after waiting for some time. I felt bad, not only because I would miss talking to them, but I hate keeping people waiting. I think it's terribly rude. Fortunately, I was still able to have a good discussion with Dr. Amit Kumar Mishra. He works on colonial Indian diasporas, the Indians who were taken by the British to various parts of the empire in east and southern Africa, the Indian Ocean islands, and the Caribbean. These diasporas are quite different from the more recent, the postcolonial diasporas. Their identification and engagements with India are more distant and tentative because they are fundamentally citizens of their countries of residence. Also, since they went as colonial subjects, their political citizenship has never been with India. They might be interested in visiting and investing, but their loyalty lies with the countries they have lived in since their ancestors left. This is true of the Indian diaspora in countries like Fiji and Malaysia where the Indians went in large enough numbers to maintain cohesive communities. It is even more challenging where they went in relatively small numbers, as was the case with the Sikhs who were taken to California to work on farms. They were gradually forced to cut links and abandon many of their cultural traditions, including wearing turbans, and they began to trim their hair. The descendants of these Sikhs find it hard to identify with the new Sikhs who have come more recently and are able to maintain some of their cultural traditions and practices. Thus, numbers matter in the process of diasporization, the ability of diasporas to maintain old and develop new identities. Also important in the ebbs and flows of diaspora identity formation is the standing of the country of ancestral origin. The old diaspora was reluctant to identify with India because of the country's lowly standing. Now, with the rise of India as a major economic power, they are more comfortable, even eager to identify with the homeland of their ancestors. There is a new twist with those of Muslim descent. Following the partition of India and Pakistan at independence, they identified more with Pakistan as a Muslim nation than with India. Now, given the relatively poor reputation of Pakistan and especially western fears and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims as terrorists, many are keen to claim Indian ancestry; that their ancestors came from parts of contemporary India. It is these considerations, which have given rise in the western academy, to push for South Asian diaspora studies rather than Indian diaspora studies.

I found the analysis quite fascinating and it has parallels with the old and new African diasporas and the tendencies of extra-regional or extra-continental diaspora scholars who wish to frame transnational diaspora studies' geographies. Once again, I wish I could have talked to him much longer. We exchanged contacts and he gave me some of his Center's occasional paper publications. Our conversation simply reinforced the fact that there is indeed much to be gained from comparative diaspora studies.

The same taxi driver who had dropped me off had returned to pick me up for my next appointment, which Professor Pande had organized. She regretted that she couldn't accompany me because this was a very busy period as the semester was about to start. I was supposed to meet Khaja Bin Mohsin, one of the people I tried unsuccessfully to reach yesterday, at 2:00 p.m. and from there I could try to reach Mohad Bin Hasan and meet him at 3:00 p.m., which shouldn't be difficult since they live in the same neighborhood, A.C. Guards, which stands for African Constabulary Guards.

Interestingly, not only did the driver seem not to have heard of A.C. Guards, but when we got there he seemed anxious to leave when we drove around and couldn't find the house number in this dense, poor, but not desolate neighborhood with its narrow streets and dark people—not that he wasn't dark himself, for he could easily have passed for the Siddis and other Indians we saw on the streets or a dark-skinned Somali. Perhaps it was just unfamiliarity. Whatever it was, we couldn't find Khaja Bin Mohsin's place and we had to return to the hotel, which, as it turned out, wasn't too far. Just like their history, the Siddis are located in the invisible back alleys of Hyderabad and its sanitized city center.

I was immensely disappointed, but consoled by what I thought was a productive visit to the University of Hyderabad. The buffet dinner cheered me up a little more. The openness of the restaurant also meant one could enjoy the sight of the beautiful people of Hyderabad in their expensive saris and exquisite suits and kurtas, going to what seemed an extravagant wedding reception. I joked with the waitress that maybe I should gatecrash. She laughed.

June 18, 2009

Doing this kind of research can be a rollercoaster—some appointments work, others don't, some days you get a lot of useful information, other days you do not. Today was one of those days. Last night I managed to confirm an appointment with Mr. Mohsin, that he and several others would come to the hotel at 11:00 a.m.; at least that's what the hotel attendant said. I had asked him to talk to Mr. Mohsin to ensure no linguistic miscomprehension. Originally, I had planned to visit two museums today, Salarjung and Nizam's; the latter is close to Charminar where a community of Habshi or Siddis lives. I had arranged to meet the driver who took me to the University of Hyderabad at 10:00 a.m. I tried to call him to cancel, but got no response. I went to wait for him but he never turned up. Neither did Mr. Mohsin.

I placed another call to Mr. Mohsin and the hotel attendant said he said I could find him at A.C. Guards. This time I decided to take a hotel car, whose higher cost would hopefully be validated by finding Mr. Mohsin's house. And that's how it turned out. To make matters even better, the hotel car driver spoke good English. Once we reached the neighborhood, we called Mr. Mohsin and we had no difficulty finding his house. His son, Afsar Bin Mohsin, welcomed us. A tall, handsome, bearded, brown-skinned young man, probably in his late 20s or early 30s, he took us to another house across the narrow street and sat us in a room facing the street; it looked like someone slept in there. On one wall were three shelves packed with drums. The driver left and we agreed he would come to pick me up once I was done.

We were soon met by his father, Mr. Khaja Bin Mohsin, Mr. Abdula Bin Habib, the deputy leader of the location, and many other men, including one who looked like he was in his 80s. Many more people stopped by and joined us or stayed briefly before going about their business. A few young people also came by, but only two women did—a mother and her daughter. Altogether, I met more than two dozen people. Most of them had my complexion, had my physique, and would not be out of place anywhere in much of Africa, from Senegal to Somalia, Mali, or Malawi. Their curiosity, surprise, fascination, and even pleasure was palpable: here I was, someone who looked like them, but was from

far away, from the land of their ancestors about which they only had vague memories, knew so little, whose peoples they had not encountered in their own neighborhood.

The conversation was dominated by Khaja, Afsar, Abdula, and when she was invited to help with translation, Pithi, the daughter, also called Maria, she quickly added. Medium built with receding hair and bloodshot eyes, Khaja was in his 60s and his enthusiasm was infectious, while Abdula was also in his 60s. He was chubby and wore a blue short-sleeved shirt and a multi-colored cloth; he would smile mischievously and occasionally crack up laughing and speaking in Urdu. Afsar would frequently repeat what they said in clearer English, a role Pithi took over for a while. A young woman with chubby cheeks wearing a light blue and white sari, she seemed to relish her role and fluency in English. Her mother, a tall woman with a bizarre scar on her neck, would look at her and the rest of us beaming with pride. Several older women passed by but nobody stayed beyond a peek.

They said they originally came from Yemen, so they called themselves Yemeni. When I asked for clarification about the name, they said it was interchangeable with Siddi, although they preferred to be called Yemenis. Their ancestors first came, about 500 of them, as body guards for the rulers of the state of Nizam. They were given as a gift to the Nizam. Now the community had grown to more than 2,000. They knew that other people were brought from Africa who settled in different parts of the country. Some became influential and heads of communities but they were not sure if they became rulers, as such.

Currently, they do not have connections with Siddi communities outside Hyderabad. Their community, they insisted, is very united. A.C. Guards is regarded as the center of all Siddi communities in Hyderabad and they all look up to the leaders here, such as Abdula. They work together to help each other, especially the poorer members of the community. Mutual assistance includes such things as housing renovations. They insisted that theirs is a mixed community with people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. Some people work for the government. Others are policemen, railway workers, vendors, and shop assistants. There are also those who are musicians and entertainers. In terms of religion, some are Christians, Hindus, or Muslim. I was later taken to a Christian church in the neighborhood alongside which was a mosque, and Afsar kept repeating that everybody lives together whether Muslim, Christian or Hindu. I was told relations with other Indians were good, that A.C. Guards is a united community despite religious, social, or racial differences among people.

When I asked what they knew about Africa they said they didn't know anything about it. Abdulla said he was fifth generation in Hyderabad, not much had been passed on about the history of Africa. They all said they would like to know more about Africa. In fact, they would love to visit, to see where their ancestors came from. I was the first African to visit them in A.C. Guards and they wondered if I could facilitate a trip for a few of them, perhaps six, to Africa. Six because that was a good size for a musical group, which could go and perform and tell people in Africa about India and their community, they said. I mentioned that I had heard that a Siddi musical troupe visited Tanzania some years ago. This only seemed to fuel their interest and to press me hard to assist them in arranging a visit to Africa. I suggested they might want to contact African embassies in New Delhi. It sounded lame, a cop out, and Abdula gave me a squint of suspicion. He said people came here to talk to them, saying they are doing research, but never really help them. Their main needs are education for their kids, food, shelter, clothing and weddings. They also need medical assistance.

Perhaps noticing my discomfort, which I tried hard to disguise, Pithi deftly switched the subject and talked about dowry and marriage in the community. Dowry was outlawed,

she said, but it is still practiced, because it is still seen as important. Intermarriages with other Indians were increasing. She estimated that 70% of marriages are arranged and 30% are love-based. The diet of the community is also changing, which adds to the cost of living. People are eating more chicken than before. Previously it was primarily a vegetarian diet. It was in this context that I was informed and invited to a wedding tomorrow. At the mention of the wedding, they all beamed, and implored me to attend. It's in the evening, several said in unison. Come at 7:00, Abdula said with a big smile. I replied I would try to come but at that moment, I was ruminating on the ethics of research and knowledge production on poor communities.

They were of course right that they did not benefit from these encounters. I would get my information, even validation, by visiting them, disappear and publish my book to enhance my career and scholarly reputation. Since I am not an ethnographer, I have not had to wrestle with these questions regularly and develop a rationale. Even for this research, I have mainly been talking to other scholars or informants whose material conditions are nowhere near as dire as the people I talked to in A.C. Guards. But I felt sufficiently perturbed that I gave Abdula a token gift of 2,000 rupees. Actually, I didn't have a choice. Although I had already decided to do so, before I left he asked Pithi to come back to relay the message in as clear English as possible that they would appreciate if I could assist them.

When Pithi and her mother left, Khaja and Afsar began playing their drums and dancing. Abdulla took over and beat the drums with growing ecstatic energy as Khaja and a few others shuffled their feet and shook their bodies as if they had never forgotten Africa. Without standing up, as there was no space, I joined them while seated, moving my upper torso and feet energetically to the pulsating rhythms of the drums. The drumming and singing served as a clarion call for more people to stop by. The drums belong to a band that plays regularly within and outside the neighborhood. It was so moving.

Afsar and two other men, including the owner of a motor rickshaw, offered to show me the neighborhood. We drove along the narrow streets as they waved and shouted at their friends until we got to the church. The compound consisted of a church we entered, a primary school where kids in white and blue uniforms were on break and playing, and a hospital. This is certainly a low working-class neighborhood, rather than a slum. The streets looked relatively clean and so did the tiny houses attached in long blocks. Nearby was a bigger hospital, which they pointed to, and there were mosques and Hindu temples as well as small shops and kiosks.

When we returned, the taxi driver from the hotel, Khaja Basha, who Afsar had called before we went on our tour, was waiting for me. I shook their hands and thanked them for allowing me to spend time with them. Abdulla and Khaja reminded me about tomorrow's wedding. They want to see me dance. I told the young man who was going to a local college, Khaja Bin Fazulla, to work hard, and wished him good luck. Both he and his elder brother, Ibrahim, reminded me of my younger brothers. Their resemblances with Steve, when he was their age, and the late James, were quite striking. I was indeed connected to these people. At that moment, the bonds felt quite emotional and I almost choked up.

The taxi driver could see I had had a wonderful time and offered to bring me back tomorrow evening for the wedding. He suggested that we leave for the museum at 9:00 a.m. I spent the rest of the day catching up on the news online and reading the remaining stack of magazines. I wished I had brought some novels. It's not too late, I promised myself, to buy some in Bangalore. I almost got tempted to write a blog on Iran but I just downloaded

dozens of commentaries to read to see how the post-election crisis is being covered in different countries and from different ideological positions before I write my own commentary. I contacted Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi at the University of Toronto for his views and recommendations of Iranian commentaries I should read. He responded within half an hour with a short essay he said he wrote yesterday, which I posted. He offered a refreshing perspective which is largely absent in the western media which sees the crisis largely in terms of a struggle between democracy and Islam. Mohamad sees it as a critical juncture in the further democratization of the Islamic republic, not between Islam and democracy, but democratization *within* Islam. Failure to do so will turn Iran into a more glorified Zimbabwe. It's all very intriguing, the implications for Iran itself, the region, and the world at large including Africa.

June 19, 2009

I was all set for the visit to the museums, the Salarjung museum, India's third largest with apparently an incredible collection of ancient and modern art from India itself and other parts of the world, and Nizam's museum, which holds gifts given to the late Nizam on his Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1936. Nearby in Barkas is one of the major Muslim neighborhoods in the city which is home to many Siddis who claim descent from bodyguards of the Nizam rulers of the state of Hyderabad. But it was not to be. The taxi driver did come by 9:00 a.m. as agreed, but he remembered that, this being Friday and a prayer day for Muslims, the museums were closed. He suggested that we go shopping, which had little appeal to me. I should have suggested that we go to Barkas, shorthand for the Military Barracks of the Nizam. I didn't think of that until I went back to my room and decided to finish my sleep.

By the time I got up, I was feeling quite hungry, although I had already eaten breakfast. I tried to hold off eating anything since I had been invited for dinner at Prof. Pande's. But by mid-afternoon, I couldn't resist the temptation to order room service. I would have gone downstairs but I was watching Ayatollah Khamenei's live address on BBC. The pundits said it was a well-crafted and tough speech. I wasn't too impressed. His denial of systematic vote rigging was, of course, unconvincing, while his attack on the western media and western powers was correct—but it was a distraction.

As if I needed uplifting for an essentially wasted day, I finally met a taxi driver, Mohamad Muntaz, who not only spoke good English but also knew about the Siddis. In fact, when I first saw him I mistook him for one. Tall, dark, with closely cropped hair that betrayed curls, he looked like a Somali or Sudanese. It turned out he actually went to school in A.C. Guards. He worked in Dubai for seven years where he learned to speak fluent Arabic. He had been married for six years and has three kids; the youngest is eighteen months old. There are many black people in India, he said, by which he meant dark-skinned people like himself. Relations between them and the light-skinned Indians, whom he called white, are generally good, although there are lingering effects from the caste system. His own wife is a white Indian, he revealed, in fact. The Siddi or Yemeni communities, as he called them, of A.C. Guards and Barkas, are quite different.

While those of A.C. Guards are from the lower working class, those from Barkas are much better off. Many of them go to the Gulf, and when they come back they are able to improve their houses or even move to better parts of the city. Barkas is a much bigger and more dynamic community than A.C. Guards. All of this only made me regret more

the fact that I had not visited Barkas. From this taxi driver, I was able to learn more about the history of Hyderabad, how the city had changed dramatically in the last ten years, that development is trickling down to the poor. I also learned about its social and religious composition, that Muslims and Christians are almost evenly divided. And as we drove through HITEC City, the new information technology and engineering center of Hyderabad, he remarked that a lot of ordinary people including the Siddis are now putting a lot more stock on education than ever before.

On the way to Professor Pande's house, I talked to Mohamad Muntaz more than I had talked to all the taxi drivers since I came to India combined. The house was only four kilometers from the university. It was as if I had actually met him before, so easy flowing was the conversation. That served as a wonderful prelude to the rest of the evening.

Professor Pande and her husband greeted me at the gate of their conjoined bungalow. One of the lecturers from her department, whom I had met when I visited the campus, was also there. Sureshi, Pande's husband, immediately jumped to Malawi. It is a beautiful country, he said, which he had visited several times. In fact, his first boss, the one who employed him was the Malawian scientist, Lewis Mughogho who was once principal of the Bunda College of Agriculture, a constituent college of the University of Malawi, before he relocated to India to work at the Indian Institute of Plantation Management. Sureshi talked fondly of his trips and stays in other African countries from Zambia to Nigeria; how friendly and warm the people are, the wonderful weather, claiming, with some exaggeration, that it never gets hot in Africa, how fertile southern Africa is that it could feed the whole continent.

But he was not beyond repeating some stereotypes, to which courtesy prevented me from responding: African food is simple, consisting largely of a porridge base, whether maize or cassava or other pounded grains and tubers; all African cultures, save for Ethiopia, are based on oral traditions; corruption in Africa is more extreme than in India because Africans lost their traditional gods; on and on he went, clearly animated and a little too keen to show off his knowledge of Africa. But his intellectual self-regard extended to Indian history as he frequently interrupted and tried to correct the lecturer and his wife on how to write history papers.

I actually found the lecturer, with his mischievous nervous laugh and long hair, quite erudite. His knowledge of ancient Indian and world history was immense. He discussed the ancient connections between Egypt and Ethiopia and India with an impressive mastery of detail. I didn't know that the Indian Ocean was once called the Ethiopian Sea. He suggested that the Negroid peoples of Asia, from the Philippines to Papua New Guinea, were part of the African diaspora, an idea some refer to as the *Black Pacific*, but I have yet to find convincing evidence that these populations were formed out of historical rather than prehistoric movements which, if we go back far enough, would apply to all human populations.

The dinner was fabulous: biryani rice, tandoori chicken, beans, chapatis, and other vegetarian dishes. Unfortunately, I wasn't too hungry. I regretted taking such a late lunch although it was 8:00 when we started dinner after an hour of spirited, if one-sided, conversations. Prof. Pande and I said little for much of the evening. As did their son who came in from an exam at the engineering college he is attending just before dinner started. A friendly but typical teenager who couldn't be too bothered with our conversation, he happily concentrated on his food.

I didn't want Mohamad waiting too long, so around 9:00 I bid them a heartfelt thanks and farewell. But before I could leave, Sureshi was eager to show me his art collection

from Malawi and other African countries, mostly sculpture. There were several Egyptian paintings hanging in the dining room. Several pieces of tourist sculpture hung in the spacious kitchen and the cozy family room. It is a very nice home, I told them as I left. Most people like to hear how nice their houses are. In this case, it was true.

Both Mohamad and I were impressed with the fact that Sureshi had brought Mohamad food. But I wondered why he had not just invited him in if he had wanted to be so generous. I had asked Mohamad to come and pick me up in two hours but he insisted on waiting for me. We decided to drive to the wedding in A.C. Guards to which I had been invited. It also gave me a chance to see Hyderabad at night—crammed and vibrant, swarming with shoppers and revelers, discreet lovers and rowdy young men, and vendors carrying lamps for light. Afsar met us at A.C. Guards. He wondered why I had come so late. Like yesterday, he invited me to meet several older men, including Abdulla, who were sitting outside enjoying the cool evening air. Abdulla's white inner shirt seemed to match his white hair as he pumped my hand, obviously pleased to see me. After we were served drinks of soda, Afsar took us to the hall where the wedding reception was being held. We could hear the drums from a distance. The place was packed with Siddis, young and old, mostly men. Several kids surrounded me and the more I shook their hands the more they came, intrigued by this black stranger who only spoke English. In their resplendent outfits, the children were a pleasure to behold, little African Indians being acculturated into their diasporic identity. They competed in showing me their dance steps and followed me as Afsar led me to the dais to meet the groom and his father and new father-in-law. But before I ascended the dais, the drummers approached us and Afsar signaled me to dance. Stiffly but unsuccessfully, I think, I tried to compete with the young folks including Khaja Bin Fazulla who seemed ecstatic to see me. After a few songs, Afsar signaled the drummer to walk back as he pulled me to the dais where he introduced me to the wedding party. I hugged them all including the groom with his garland of roses around his chest. Several pictures were taken. They invited me to the feast behind the dais, but I was too full and I didn't want to keep Mohamad waiting much longer.

They must like you, Mohamad said as we drove back to the hotel. Afsar was keen to show you around, he continued. Siddis either like you or they don't, he noted. They are widely feared, for they are fierce, they don't even hesitate to kill if they feel wronged, he added. But you are easy to like, for you seem to like people, you definitely like Siddis, he concluded with a smile of wonder. I smiled as well, relieved and a little grateful that the day hadn't been totally wasted. Then it occurred to both of us that we hadn't seen the bride!

June 20, 2009

Mohamad came to pick me up early for the airport via Barkas. This was a journey into old Hyderabad with its peaceful, rundown buildings and narrow streets and public and national treasures from the historic Osmania General Hospital to the renowned Medina Hotel, and the legendary Charminar, the towering monument built in the late sixteenth century. With its minarets, this is one of the great buildings of Islamic architecture. Nearby is the Mecca Masjid, one of the oldest and biggest mosques in the city. Indeed, Charminar as an area is full of beautiful mosques, a testament to the fact that this continues to be a predominantly Muslim part of the city. The heavy presence of the police, explained

Mohamad, was also because there were a lot of Hindus and the police were there to prevent sectarian violence between the two communities.

As this was still very early in the morning—just after 6:00 a.m.—the streets were largely deserted. Fortunately, by the time we got to Barkas, the city had started coming alive and there were people around or gathered at tea houses sharing the beginning of a new day. We parked the taxi by one of the houses and joined the men who were gathered who ranged from teenagers to a 95-year-old man. Barkas is much bigger than A.C. Guards. Unlike the latter, which seems to revel in its mixed religious communities, Barkas is predominantly Muslim, at least all the dozen or so people I talked to were Muslim. But like the residents of A.C. Guards, the people call themselves Yemeni. The fact that many of them can speak Arabic reinforces their sense of an Arabic identity.

This is largely because most of the men here have at one time or another worked in the Gulf. The number of years they worked there I heard ranged from 6 to 25 years. I asked the man who had spent 25 years in Dubai why he came back. This is my home, he responded. The man who returned after working for six years with Aramco, the huge Saudi oil company, did so to get married and planned to go back in the future. Migrant labor seems to be the main source of lucrative employment and resources that have allowed people in the area to refurbish their homes and to set up businesses. Barkas does look more prosperous and commercially vibrant than A.C. Guards, which became more evident as the morning went on, traders opened their shops and more people gathered at the tea houses and restaurants for breakfast. The man who had spent 25 years in Dubai invited us for breakfast, which we politely turned down.

The memory of their history is remarkably similar to what I heard in A.C. Guards. The 95-year-old man seemed to be held in great respect for his age and the fact that he was the muezzin, and talked authoritatively about the community's history. Occasionally, he would stare at me with his watery eyes, a smile breaking on his face, exposing partially toothless gums. His great grandfather came as a guard for the Nizams and he too worked as a guard. He had of course witnessed the rise and fall of British power, the rise of independent India and decline of the princely states. All in all, he thought the position of people in Barkas had improved, although they do not seem to enjoy as much clout as before.

Africans frequently come to the neighborhood, but they don't think they have much in common, even if they might look similar (except for the Muslim Africans). It seems their identity as Muslims is strongly tied to an Arab-Yemeni identity rather than an African one per se. They also claimed that they get along well with other Indians, both Muslims and non-Muslims, but I could see a few people shake their heads in apparent disagreement. Then one ventured to say that some Indians look down on them because of the way they look, regarding them not as real Indians. But they are Indian like everybody else, they agreed emphatically. It was also pointed out that intermarriages are growing, especially if the couple are both Muslim. Some local women who get married in the Gulf never come back. There is now a crackdown on such marriages by the government because some were fake, the women were abused and sometimes turned to prostitution. There are clearly gendered anxieties about this narrative: men's migration to the Gulf is associated with opportunity, while women's migration signals danger for the women themselves and the integrity of the community.

Once again, it became clear that I had only scratched the surface with such a flyby visit. The people I talked to were as welcoming and generous as the people I met in A.C. Guards. They wanted to know when I would come back. It was also clear, despite their claim of Yemeni and Arab descent, that they regarded me as one of them, a person who

may not be connected to them in terms of nationality and perhaps religion, but with whom they shared racial and ancestral affinity nonetheless.

As we drove to the airport, Mohamad quizzed me about my religious background and attitude toward Muslims. This merely underscored Muslim anxieties and anger at what many Muslims regard as misguided, malicious, and distorted misrepresentation of their religion, the unfair association of Islam and terrorism. We seemed to agree that violence is not a monopoly of any religion or culture. That's when he told me more of his fluency in Arabic and how people from Sudan or Somalia are surprised when they meet him that he can speak Arabic so well and is a Muslim and looks like them but he is Indian. When he dropped me off at the airport, we both agreed that I would contact him if I ever came back to Hyderabad.

I would have loved to sleep but the flight was too short. Besides, the stewards were keen to serve their box of breakfast which they flung on my tray, nudging me to open my eyes in the process. The stew was nasty and they served us no drink, which made the entire enterprise rather annoying. Three quarters of an hour later, we were at Bangalore's relatively new and modern airport, around which there was some construction. I took a Meru taxi, the same company as the taxi driven by Mohamad. But I didn't meet his replica. The taxi driver was a throwback to those I had encountered earlier for whom English was truly a foreign tongue. So all I could do was stare outside when I was not checking e-mail on my Blackberry. There were all those airport-related businesses in the vicinity and as we drove further away from the airport I was struck by the trees all around—mango, blue gum, palm, all sorts of tropical trees—broken by the highway and blocks of residential buildings and shops and the occasional road side kiosks. It looked like a version of New Delhi in its greenness. It also felt like Hyderabad with less construction. The heavy traffic, honking and zigzagging by the car drivers, rickshaws and motorcycles gave it a feel of Mumbai. We passed a quarry, a hospital, a mall, and seemed to drive endlessly until we reached Windsor Square where the Le Meridien Hotel is located. Its location reinforced the feeling of being in New Delhi; like the Taj Mahal Hotel, there were no shops nearby that I could easily walk to. That's what I had liked about the location of the Taj President in Mumbai, even the Taj Deccan in Hyderabad. Le Meridien resembles the Taj Deccan a little in terms of its internal design insofar as the three floors stare into an open courtyard. My room is a grade above, more like the room in New Delhi in terms of size, décor and furniture.

I immediately called Dr. Prasad, my local contact in Bangalore, and we agreed that I would go to his office about 15 kilometers from the hotel soon after taking my lunch. I thought I would be there by 1:30 p.m., but by then the taxi had not arrived. The hotel taxi, which I was offered, had an exorbitant charge and by now, I feel wiser to the differential costs of public and hotel transport. I was surprised it took so long to get a taxi. In New Delhi and Mumbai, they were lined up outside the hotel. Half an hour later, a taxi finally came whose driver immediately stated, *No English*, which meant I couldn't give him directions and I let him call Dr. Prasad. The long drive merely confirmed what I had seen from the airport, the efforts to keep this rambling and rolling city green, the uneasy combination of the decrepit and the high-tech, sparse elite suburbs and congested poor quarters, and above all the colorful diversity of the people in terms of their appearance, comportment, and mannerisms, their relative significations of ethnicity, class, culture, religion, gender, and age and their convivialities, contradictions, conflicts, constraints, and connections.

Overall, the people on the streets looked darker, black with straight hair like James Brown with conked hair. If color were all there is to the African diaspora, as is often

implied in the Atlantic model, then these people would qualify for being considered a part of the African diaspora. I gather dark-skinned people predominate further south in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where apparently few would stop me or stare at me as a foreigner. Yet these people are clearly not part of the African diaspora simply because of their blackness, a testimony, if any were required, that a diaspora identity transcends the imagined affinities and geographies of race and color. Considering black Indians as an extension of the African diaspora would be as absurd as treating the Berbers of North Africa as an extension of the European diaspora.

After getting lost a couple of times, we managed to get to the offices of Dr. Prasad more than an hour and a half later than originally planned. Dr. Kiran Kama Prasad is the Secretary of Vimukta Trust and overall coordinator of JEEVIKA, an organization dedicated to ending bonded labor and empowering currently bonded laborers, landless agricultural workers, *dalit* (untouchable) and *adivasi* (aboriginal) youths. A tall man with the beneficent demeanor of the Catholic priest that he used to be, he greeted me warmly and invited me into the building that serves as the center of the Trust and JEEVIKA. He introduced me to the two women working on the computers in the small office who briefly looked up and to the three black young men, who greeted me as a long lost brother. They were Siddis.

Dr. Prasad took me into the adjoining hall, which is large enough to hold up to a couple hundred people. Save for the long table we sat at and bundles of chairs, it was largely empty. As we talked, we were served sweet masala tea and some snacks. A deeply passionate and intense man unflinchingly committed to social justice, he speaks with disarming calmness looking you straight in the eye, probing, inviting connection. I explained the purpose of my research. He talked about his background, his work on Siddis and how that led to his current work in the anti-bonded movement. He used to be a Jesuit priest named Cyprian Henry Lobo. Years later, he changed his name to Kiran Kamal Prasad when he abandoned the priesthood to become more involved with dalits and bonded labor. He found little support from the Catholic Church for his activist work.

His first contact with the Siddis started in May or June 1979, soon after he was ordained a priest in late April when he was asked to help with the remote Parish of Haliyal where many Siddis lived in the forest regions. He increasingly realized that while Christian salvation was important, what the Siddis really needed was social transformation. His growing concern for the poor was also reflected in his efforts to understand indigenous Indian cultures and to free himself from westernization, including his own name. He found inspiration in the example of Francis Xavier and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which enabled him to understand the structural dynamics of poverty and the need for social action and cultivating agency among the poor and oppressed. This led him to studying anthropology and social analysis, and for his master's dissertation, he decided to study the Siddis, one of the most marginalized communities in North Karnataka.

After he completed his MA it increasingly became clear to him that for the status of the Siddis to change for the better it was crucial to work and struggle alongside them to change their official status. An immediate goal was to get them recognized as a scheduled tribe (ST) which would provide them both dignity and government support. As it happened, after he finished his MA studies, he was sent to Mundgod together with two other priests on a mission to find out what could be done in the region to improve poor people's lives. He proposed a stay in Mainally, one of the two Catholic Siddi settlements in Mundgod. His proposal was accepted, but the idea of undertaking a detailed study

of the socioeconomic conditions of the Siddis and ST status for them was rejected because it was divisive. Also rejected was the idea of doing a survey for the whole of Uttara Kannada district. He persisted and permission was later reluctantly given by the Provincial Catholic authorities.

He lived among the Siddis for a year, sharing their lives as much as possible, eating their food, living in their homes, and participating in their activities. He did not harbor grandiose plans for their development but believed passionately that their lot could be improved through their own agency, by getting themselves better organized and developing strong collective leadership that could access and take advantage of existing government schemes and programs. He also started adult literacy classes and encouraged the Siddis of Mainally to purchase land adjoining the settlement and to cultivate it collectively and use the proceeds to set up a common fund.

With the support of the Karnataka government and the Catholic Bishop, he and a team of about twenty social workers undertook a survey of socioeconomic conditions in Yellapur and Haliyal, which was undertaken in two months in 1984–1985. Copies of the report—a thousand copies were made—were presented to the relevant officials and ministries at the state and central level. On January 8, 1986, the Government of Karnataka passed an order recognizing the Siddis of Uttara Kannada among scheduled tribes, which was extended to all Siddis in the state under a modified order issued in June 1986. Finally, following representations by the All Karnataka Siddi Development Association (AKSDA), the central government recognized the Siddis in Karnataka as a scheduled tribe in January 2003.

The survey formed the basis of his 2005 book, *In Search of an Identity: An Ethnographic Study of the Siddis in Karnataka*, a copy of which he gave me. He also gave me a copy of the massive compendium, *The African Diaspora in Asia: Explorations on a Less Known Fact*, which he co-edited from the conference held in Goa in 2006. He is the Secretary of TADIA (the African Diaspora in Asia) Society of India. The book and our discussion covered a wide range of issues concerning Siddi history, their socioeconomic conditions, and cultural practices as well as how they compare to other scheduled tribes. I was fascinated to hear that the Siddis generally did not know what their name meant and that, as they learned more about their history, which also includes Siddi kings and rulers, they began to develop a more empowering identity. Moreover, they began to identify collectively as Siddi, not just as Muslim Siddis, Christian Siddis, or Hindu Siddis. This seemed to underscore the role of academics and social activism in the construction of diaspora identities.

According to the study, in the early 1980s the Siddis of Karnataka lived in forest settlements. Only a few Siddi families lived in towns. In one area, along the sloped hills of the Western Ghats, the Siddis lived on the edges of a Brahmin community and most were Hindu. In the plateau forests, the Siddis lived in small clusters and they tended to be either Christian or Muslim. More than half the houses were huts with thatched roofs and bamboo screen walls and possessed few possessions. They spoke several languages, although they all understood Konkani, and are familiar with Kannada, the regional language. The Muslim Siddis also speak Urdu. Out of the entire Siddi population in Karnataka, only 9.6% were literate. Indeed, when strict standards of literacy are applied, only 5.3% were literate. However, a growing number of Siddi children were attending school. The Christian Siddis were educationally more advanced than the Muslim and Hindu Siddis.

As for occupation, more than 98% were agricultural wage laborers (daily wage labor, contract wage labor, and bonded labor in which boys are bonded long-term or an entire

family is bonded for years or more); farmers who work their own lands or on encroached lands, lands taken on lease and lands given on lease in which different forms of sharecropping operate; and as foragers of forest products from timber and firewood to honey; and hunting and fishing. The remaining 1.7% of households earned their income from non-agricultural sources. Politically, they lived in segmented, egalitarian communities with little formal leadership beyond each settlement; within settlements there were headmen, orderlies and treasurers, offices that carried no remuneration but a lot of prestige.

In terms of family, social and cultural organization in the 1980s, the majority were nuclear families, patriarchy was strongly pronounced, and elders enjoyed respect. Kinship relations were quite strong. In terms of religion, 42% were Catholics, about 32% were Muslim, and 27% were Hindu. Religious identification appeared to be strongest among the Muslims, although all seemed to have incorporated strong beliefs in what he termed animism and ancestral spirits. Their lifestyle rituals, despite some religious differences also exhibited commonality as concerns pregnancy, childbirth, childhood, puberty, marriage and funeral ceremonies, and festivals and recreation, especially music and dance. After listening and reading about some of these cultural practices, whose African origins are evident and which seemed to identify the Siddi as a distinct community from the other Indian communities, I was taken aback by the notion that they have lost all their African cultural heritage.

This is not to argue that a diasporic identity is only maintained through cultural retentions; it is merely to observe that such retentions are quite evident among the Siddis. I was also not entirely convinced by Dr. Prasad's assertion that the Siddis didn't know they were from Africa until his project. Disregarding such amnesia, which is quite different from saying they didn't know the specific region in Africa from which their ancestors came, what struck me is the differences with the Hyderabad Siddis, who claim a Yemeni descent, and the Gujarat Siddis who are apparently conscious of their east African connections because of continuous contacts with the region. I wish I had included Gujarat in the places to visit.

I was fascinated by his discussion of how the Siddis are perceived by other Indians. Most Indians have a low opinion of them and hold negative stereotypes, including the notion that they are lazy, when in fact their labor is so prized. There seems to be racial contempt for the Siddis, and intermarriage between the Siddis and other Indians was rare at the time he did his research. Economic insecurity and isolation encourages inferiority complexes among the Siddis, but they didn't always accept the assumed superiority of other groups such as the Marathas or Bandhis. And the Siddis consider themselves superior to the untouchables and other marginalized groups.

Dr. Prasad's study was also intended to facilitate the development of a strong Siddi organization, increasing general awareness about their strengths and skills, and redressing their dismal living conditions. He noted that since his study was completed, considerable improvements have been recorded. The AKSDA, formed in 1986, has grown and has inspired the formation of other Siddi organizations and cooperatives and established networks with national and international scholars. Various development projects have been implemented by the Siddis themselves and sympathetic organizations. The Siddis have also become better organized in presenting their culture and participating in district level, regional, and national and even international cultural festivals or tours. They have also received growing recognition as athletes—in 1988 two Siddi women, Kamala Babu Siddi and Kuppi Siddi won national championships in the women's pentathlon and in

the 600 meters, and many others won gold medals or other prizes in other events, and established national reputations in boxing (Lawrence Siddi), judo (David Siddi), and football (Juje Siddi).

Clearly, a lot more work needs to be done on Siddi history, conditions, and struggles, he said when I asked him about the state of Siddi studies. Accurate demographic figures of the Siddi communities are needed. In Karnataka, estimates vary widely ranging up to 18,000. He hopes that as Siddis become more educated they will take the lead in writing about their history. Now Siddi studies are dominated by non-Siddis and non-Indians, some of whom he mentioned.

This led quite nicely to my meeting with the three Siddi students I had been introduced to earlier. Their excitement was overwhelming. They introduced themselves. Ramnath Subba Siddi is a Hindu and studying for an MA in education. He is more than six feet tall and the tallest of the three. Jummasab K. Siddi, next in height, is a Muslim. He will be studying law after having finished a BA at Bangalore University. Mohan G. Siddi, the shortest, probably my height, is studying for a master's of social work and is a Muslim as well. Remarkably, they all attributed their success to a Ugandan called Bosco who originally came to study in Pune and then became interested in helping the Siddi community. They were all sponsored by him.

They spoke about Bosco with deep appreciation and love bordering on reverence. They were the first in their families, indeed among Siddis in Karnataka, to get college degrees because of the tireless efforts and support of Bosco. It is hard for Siddis to get, let alone complete, secondary school because of lack of financial resources and transport difficulties for secondary schools are often located very far away, they said. Only through Bosco's support and perseverance had they managed to overcome the obstacles, to beat the odds. There and then, I made up my mind to visit their villages, to see things for myself and perhaps meet Bosco.

They confirmed much of what I was learning about the Siddis. They were all anxious to talk, but they didn't interrupt each other as they elaborated on each other's comments. We talked about Siddi identity, cultural and social practices, occupational lives and relations with other Indians. They agreed that they didn't know when and from which part of Africa their ancestors came and they wanted me as a professor to tell them if I knew. I explained what I had read and that they probably came in different waves to different parts of India, most likely from eastern Africa, perhaps before and certainly during the time of Portuguese maritime activities in the Indian Ocean and maybe some came as late as the nineteenth century. I said hopefully there would be Siddi historians who would solve the riddle.

They agreed that they had heard about oral tradition research, archival research, and DNA research being used in the U.S. to help black people there trace their places of origin in Africa. I asked them what they thought of Africa and Africans. They said, to my surprise, that Africans are hated and feared, that older people in the community think Africans are dangerous. They don't understand why. They themselves have met African students in college and get along well with them, although the Africans often tell them that they should come back to the continent. They would like to visit, but India is their home, that's where their roots are, their people and community are.

Altogether, they estimated there are 14,000–15,000 Siddis in their home district. The term *Siddi* is often used as a surname to self-identify and show pride in their identity. Mohan said his grandmother had told him that *Siddi* meant someone who was born to

serve, but he now knows that *Siddi* had a good history and some Siddis have played an important role in Indian history, so there is nothing to be ashamed of in being called Siddi. They noted there are religious differences among the Siddis, as some are Hindus, others Christians or Muslims. But all three groups work together. The Christians and Muslims tend to stay in larger villages than the Hindus who are scattered in single and isolated settlements in the forests. Men of any faith can marry women of other faiths because the women can change their religion to follow the man's religion, but men don't do that. Among Muslims, child marriages for girls take place, so they can marry between ages thirteen and eighteen, while Christian girls tend to marry between ages sixteen and twenty, while for boys among all three religions, the age is between twenty and twenty-five. The Christian community is the largest, followed by Muslims, and finally the Hindus.

Most Siddis, especially among the older people, are illiterate. So they are agricultural laborers or farmers. Christian and Muslim Siddis also tend to migrate to other states and places such as Goa and Maharashtra for seasonal work. Several factors distinguish the Siddi from other Indians. First, they look different physically. Second, they differ from other Indians who share religious affiliations in terms of language. While they all speak Kannada, Siddi Muslims also speak Urdu, Christian Siddis speak Marathi, and Hindu Siddis speak Konkani. The three communities communicate through Kannada and Konkani. Third, they share many cultural customs and practices that are not practiced by other Indians of the same religion. This is particularly true with regard to rituals, music, and dance, although different locations might use different drums and practice different dances such as *daman* or *pugdi*.

They agreed that they are generally looked down upon by other Indians. Even the dark-skinned Indians, dalits, feel superior to them, and intermarriages with other Indians are not common. India is a caste society in which the Brahmins believe they are superior and treat other Indians, especially the untouchables, atrociously. The Siddis are sometimes treated as untouchables in that they are not allowed to enter the homes of the Brahmins, eat with them, or draw water from the pipes at the same time. Even now, it still happens that Siddi workers and servants are forced to eat outside on banana leaves. The combination of racial discrimination and the caste system leads to a lot of exploitation of the Siddis. Many Siddis often borrow money from the Brahmins for marriages or for family support, which they often cannot pay back, so they end up losing their land or working for the Brahmins for life as bonded labor. The situation is truly terrible. The anger in their voices was unmistakable.

Their three ambitions, besides successfully completing their studies, were to improve the condition of their communities, communicate and collaborate with other Siddi communities in the country, and know more about Africa and other African peoples around the world and link up with them. They peppered me with questions about African history, politics, economics and cultures. Ramnath took copious notes on behalf of his colleagues. By the time we finished, it felt like one of those long graduate seminars. We could have continued for the whole evening.

Dr. Prasad, the students, and I agreed that I would go to Uttara Kannada district and visit some of the Siddi villages. I gave Dr. Prasad money for the train tickets. Jumma would accompany me since the other two would soon be sitting for exams and they needed to study.

The sleepiness I felt earlier in the afternoon which led to periodic naps as we drove to Dr. Prasad's office had long disappeared by the time the taxi took me back to the hotel.

Feeling energized by this incredibly long day, I took a slow shower and went to eat dinner by the patio facing the pool. I felt things were finally coming together.

June 21, 2009

If yesterday was intense, today was a lot more relaxed but full of anticipation. Calling for a public taxi an hour in advance didn't seem to help much, for when I got downstairs nobody seemed to know when the taxi might come. I got quite anxious, for I was expected to get to Dr. Prasad's office to pick up Jumma by 4:00 p.m. at the latest for us to go to the train station before 5:00 p.m. when the train to Dharwad was scheduled to leave.

The driver finally turned up at around 3:00 p.m. But one hour didn't seem enough, for once we got to Bangalore University, close to where Dr. Prasad's office is located, he kept getting lost. That was only the beginning. I became too anxious to appreciate much of the drive, including going through what looked like a pretty campus on a large, partly forested and tranquil terrain. I am sure even Dr. Prasad got tired of the taxi driver's frequent calls for directions. And I got tired of his frequent statements of, "okay, I know now," not to mention his constant spitting, a habit I have noticed among some of the taxi drivers.

When I finally made it to Dr. Prasad's office, there was little time for chatting and as soon as I got the train tickets and paid for the balance, Jumma and I were off. Ramnath, Mohan and another student they introduced me to, a Christian, but whose name I failed to register, all wished us a safe trip and hoped that I would enjoy visiting the villages.

Every few minutes the taxi driver would get lost and ask for directions to Yesvantpur, the train station. Although increasingly annoyed and anxious, I couldn't help feeling sorry for the poor man. We meandered through the rolling hillsides of this part of Bangalore with their charming and colorful houses and low level apartments. We finally made it to Yesvantpur with barely fifteen minutes to spare.

I relied on Jumma, which turned out to be somewhat of a problem. I followed him to the platform where he said, looking at the ticket, our train would depart from. We found ourselves a bench and sat waiting for the train. In fact, we were the only ones on that side of the platform. When it was about 5:00 p.m., I asked him whether he was sure if we were at the right platform. Across, on another platform, another train, which had been sitting for a while began to move. Jumma suddenly got the inspiration to ask the passengers popping their heads out of the small windows. Yes, it was going to Dharwad. He made a feeble effort to run for it but I wasn't about to fall off the platform trying catch a moving train.

I could see he felt terrible and I told him not to worry, things happen for a reason, I said with calm reassurance. We will catch another one, isn't there another one going there tonight? He nodded and indeed, there was. Being a Sunday, the station was not busy as it normally is. Our brief sense of relief was quickly shattered. The woman behind the counter wearing an orange sari and a green top seemed quite irascible. Not only did she refuse to change our tickets, she said she wasn't responsible for selling new tickets, which was clearly a lie for the next counter to which she pointed Jumma we were turned back to her counter at which point she decided to ignore Jumma and attend to other customers. For a moment, we wondered what to do next. I suggested we talk to a male sales clerk who looked a little more approachable. It was evident to me what was going on. I would

let my American connections trump our blackness, so I approached the clerk and explained our predicament with an affected American accent. He explained that the purchasing time for tickets to our destination would start at 7:30 p.m.

Instead of lingering at the station for the next two hours, I suggested to Jumma that we find a place nearby to eat. We hired a rickshaw that scooted its way across the highway into a congested neighborhood a couple or so miles away until we found what looked like a half-decent restaurant. We were the only customers and by then, having not eaten since breakfast and with no prospects of a meal at the station or on the train, my hunger got the better part of any concerns about the state of the establishment that I may otherwise have had. Besides, Jumma looked content with it. So we ordered a chicken dish and some chapatti. The chicken was brought in two little bowls and the chapatti placed on banana leaves, but it was quite appetizing.

By the time we got back there were more people in the station of all ages in families or groups of companions, men in pants and shirts, others in *lungis*, and a few wearing caps or turbans; women in colorful saris or dresses; young men in T-shirts emblazoned with corporate logos or faces of some star. The only visibly non-Indians were three Korean-looking men who were ahead of us in the queue. Buying the ticket turned out to be a protracted process of filling out a detailed form, but in the end, we got our new tickets for which I had to shell out nearly 1,500 rupees.

This time we made sure we asked for the correct platform and every so often, we would check with the other passengers. As we walked to the platform, the place was more packed than I remembered it earlier. Several station guards wearing khaki uniforms with guns slid over their shoulders were happily chatting up women. The station looked clean and was a beehive of activity: people rushing to their trains, some with bags, baskets or trays of eggs on their heads, pulling or carrying kids, or waving to their friends or family members good bye. We found ourselves a bench and watched the gathering sea of mobile humanity and the people sitting on other benches nearby, or hauling their luggage and goods, eating their meals, or filling bottles of water by the fountains. And there were vendors hawking soft drinks and small packets of biryani and other food items.

The train came and left on time. We made ourselves comfortable. There were two double bunk beds. The last time I had slept on a train was in the early 1980s while visiting Zimbabwe when I took a train from Harare to Bulawayo. Yes, 1983 — 26 years ago! I told Jumma which he found hard to believe. How do you travel, then, he asked. I usually fly for long distances and sometimes drive, I told him. Sharing our compartment was a young man working with DuPont in Mumbai. The fourth passenger joined us after we had all made our beds and we were ready to sleep. But he made his presence felt for much of the night: he snored like a pig the whole night. My initial excitement on finally being able to get on the train and seeing that we were served fresh pressed bed sheets for a good night's sleep soon turned sour.

June 22, 2009

In the end, I did manage to sleep. Jumma woke me up around 7:00 a.m. as we were approaching Hubli. The snorer was already up; I guess he slept well. I couldn't muster a good morning to him; neither did he.

The station was already crammed with people. That's one thing about this country. Wherever you go at whatever time there are people everywhere, teeming masses of humanity of every shade, size, and shape. Outside there was a throng of more people and rickshaws. We took one for the bus station. The station was comparatively deserted and buses were trickling in to take people into remote towns and villages. Hubli itself is a relatively small city by Indian standards, but together with its twin Dharwad, it is Karnataka's second largest city after Bangalore with a combined population of a little over a million and the major commercial and industrial center of North-Karnataka.

We ran into two Nigerians who were coming from Mumbai to visit a friend at Karnataka University, Dharwad. The first Africans I talked to in India had to be Nigerians, I said to myself. One of them had been reading a Bible when I approached them. When they heard I had come here to visit Jumma's village they looked bewildered. Aren't you African, they asked. Jumma smiled. He is Indian, I said. How, they both looked up with even more incredulity. I'm Indian, Jumma repeated, I am Siddi. They shook their heads with incomprehension. I explained who the Siddi are. We didn't know, they both exclaimed with wonder.

I thought we had come to the bus station to catch a bus to Jumma's village. It turned out we were supposed to be picked up by Bosco who had hired a van to drive us around several villages including Jumma's. Bosco and a driver found us about 45 minutes after we had arrived. They had been expecting us at the Dharwad train station, he said. I explained that we had missed our original train.

Stocky and slightly taller than me, Bosco Kaweesi is a fascinating man. We were both clearly excited to meet each other based on what the Siddi students had informed each one of us about the other. Wearing a black shirt that was not properly tucked into his khaki pants, he couldn't wait to tell me about the challenges of working among the Siddi. He talked non-stop all the way to Haliyal about 70 kilometers away and for much of the morning that we spent with him. As an African I was a rare audience, someone he could confide in, unburden his struggles, frustrations and achievements in a language I could understand and appreciate, a language that connected his two lives as an African in an African Indian community. So gripping was his story that I could hardly peek at the picturesque countryside, the valleys and hills we drove through.

He came to India fifteen years ago to study social work. He originally didn't intend to stay in the country after completing his studies. He had good job prospects in Uganda and his family expected him to return. In fact, he was offered a job by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). He is himself a Seventh Day Adventist. He was tempted to return, but he felt he could make a much greater difference by working to help the Siddis who lived under such atrocious, exploitative conditions without resources, let alone education. With ADRA, he would be a well-paid bureaucrat but he would not transform people's lives the way he could with the Siddis who had lived in this country for 700 years with few prospects of improving their lot without committed social activists working side by side with them. Whatever the problems in Africa might be, and there are many, the prospects for change, with proper leadership, the opportunities for education and development are infinitely better than they are for the Siddi. As he talked, it was clear that he felt a calling, although he didn't use that word.

This calling came when he was posted as an intern, as part of his master's degree in social work in the region, and he encountered the Siddis. He was intrigued by them—an African people who had been in India for centuries but were so deeply mired in poverty

and were amongst the lowest of the low classes and castes. Also, it was what the Siddis said that made him reflect and reconsider his options. They complained bitterly that outsiders come proclaiming good intentions, interview them and collect information but nothing in their lives ever changes for the better. Bosco was stung, his conscience pricked, he didn't want to be one of those people, those social workers who get gratification from providing superficial palliatives, who cannot see beyond Band-Aid solutions. It was one thing to provide people with bread, clothes, and such things, but it takes a committed professional to focus on the real issues, the structures that confine them to marginality and poverty and what it takes to empower them so that they can transform their lives for the long-term.

So he decided to stay and start working among the Siddis. The challenges proved even more daunting than he had imagined. Not only were the Siddis themselves stuck in their ways, full of apathy about their subordinate position in society, but the wider society, from the Brahmins to the police and the politicians, did not want any change. Even the charitable NGOs had no interest in fundamentally transforming the lives of the Siddi. Headed by other Indians convinced of the Siddis eternal marginality and inferiority, or by foreigners who didn't understand or care about the true magnitude of the Siddis' plight and wanted to maintain good relations with the local power structure and gatekeepers, the NGOs have been enemies of Siddi progress.

The scale of the opposition to his work with the Siddis soon became clear and even landed him in jail. He first set up a medical program to help improve Siddis access to health care, to help them with medical emergencies and with referrals for life-threatening diseases. Matters were brought to a head over the case of one woman who was pregnant. When her baby was due, she went to the hospital but she was unattended for several days. The doctor sent her home saying she was just being too anxious, she was not ready to deliver. But she felt sick and when she returned to the hospital, they found that the fetus had been dead for three days. Clearly, had a C-section been performed the baby would have lived. Bosco decided to take up the case and have the doctor and hospital charged with negligence. That's when all hell broke loose. The local politicians, Brahmins, and police who thought of him as a dangerous troublemaker ganged up on him. He was arrested on trumped-up criminal charges, a local judge found him guilty and he was thrown in jail. He was initially denied legal representation and later, when he was allowed a lawyer, the lawyer would not turn up at critical moments. The Ugandan embassy in New Delhi proved unhelpful, so much for having embassies!

He spent five months in jail. He wrote ceaselessly to the courts and government challenging his imprisonment. Eventually he won another hearing before a different judge. One of the charges that he was trying to convert Indians to Christianity was dropped. The charge that he was in the country illegally because his passport had expired was disproved with evidence that he had applied for renewal and the authorities were aware and had documents to prove it. In the end, he regained his freedom and the police chief who had orchestrated his arrest was dismissed. Since then, the police and local politicians try to be careful with the way they deal with him. He is not afraid of anybody, he said emphatically. He knows that what he is doing is for the long-term benefit of the Siddis.

He realized that to effect lasting change it was important to focus on the education of young people. So he established the Siddi Education Welfare Society. While the medical programs continue, his focus in recent years has been on education. He believes that once

the Siddi become more educated they will be able to speak for themselves more effectively and improve their status. He is of course only too aware that the Siddi face a myriad of other problems which he enumerated in depressing detail: many are landless or lack the resources to buy land and expand their farming; they are often indebted and end up providing bonded labor; producers of rice, cotton and honey are usually exploited by middlemen who tend to buy these products from the Siddi after they have bought from everybody else and leave the Siddi with little choice but sell at the lowest prices.

For him, what was particularly depressing were the roadblocks erected against the Siddis getting a decent education. He told the story of Siddi students being taught incomplete skills, such as those who took tailoring and only knew single-side stitching. There was an incredible story of a Siddi man who wanted to learn to read and write, and was taught one letter a year! More common are Siddis who have been to school for up to ten years but can't read or write Kannada. Teachers don't expect Siddi kids to do well and do everything in their power to ensure that they do not, in fact, learn. The local schools only offer low grades, for secondary school the Siddis have to travel long distances and need to live in dormitories. One tactic to deny them secondary education is to claim that there are no boarding places left open. When all that fails to dissuade them, excuses are sometimes concocted to have them expelled on flimsy grounds. In one school, for example, seventeen Siddis were expelled because they were involved in school fights against the headmaster. Bosco took up that case and showed that except for two, who were not involved in the fight, the other fifteen students were not even present. They were eventually reinstated and the headmaster almost lost his job.

To deal with some of these educational challenges, Bosco started offering classes to kids in his own home before he built a school in one of the Siddi villages. He also began enrolling some of the Siddi kids in schools in the major cities and outside the state. And he encouraged a group of those who completed secondary school to go to college. Parents were initially not very supportive, but after the first group of four students graduated from college, attitudes began to change. He talked like a proud parent about the growing number of Siddis who have been sponsored by his organization to attend college. This is the first generation of Siddis to get a college education in Karnataka.

We first stopped by his house in Haliyal where I met his wife, a Siddi woman who would not be thought of as a foreigner in Bosco's home, Kampala. They have three children, a girl of five and another who is a little over a year and the third is four months old. The living room doubles as an office and a meeting place in their modest house. There were several sewing machines in the room, which were once used to train local Siddis in tailoring. He kindly offered for me to take a bath and freshen up, after which we were served breakfast. The margarine comes from east Africa, he said, as a declaration of his continued connections to his homeland.

When we came in, there were several young people, all Siddi college students. They confirmed and elaborated on much of what Bosco had been saying about the conditions among Siddis and their struggles for education. They were immensely grateful to Bosco, who they addressed as uncle. Three of them accompanied Jumma and me for the rest of the day: Gonapart L. Siddi, Jairam N. Siddi, and Remuka M. Siddi, the only woman in the group. They are all law students at the University College of Law, Dharwad. I thoroughly enjoyed their company. They were bright, confident, impatient and passionately committed to helping their community. They were critical of their leaders who they thought were not radical and aggressive enough and they were contemptuously critical of social workers

and NGOs who receive money on behalf of the Siddis and other poor people but use the funds for largely their own selfish purposes.

They believed their community was taken advantage of for so long because it had no educated people, but things would now change. Gonapart revealed how he had recently had to defend his father against a Brahmin who was trying to exploit him. The Brahmin was of course not amused and cursed the education that was messing up these young Siddis. They were ready to defend their people. That's why they chose to study law. Remuka was initially shy but I encouraged her to speak by asking questions specifically directed at her and she gradually opened up. They all agreed that more Siddi women need college education. Parents tended to favor boys because they were expected to help their families, while it was thought once girls became married women they were lost to their families and were of little help.

Our tour of the villages took hours, from about 11:00 in the morning to about 9:00 at night when we rushed to the train station. We first went to Wada. The houses had definitely improved since Dr. Prasad conducted his survey in the 1980s. They were mostly built of adobe or sometimes burned brick and had tile roofs, but they looked worn and damp. Several people peeped out of their glassless windows or opened their doors as we drove by. The scene was repeated everywhere we went. This was rural Africa in rural India. We stopped by one house. The man, Bosco explained, is a member of the board of the Siddi Education Welfare Society. Despite their lack of education, he felt it critical to involve influential parents in the running of the society. We were invited in. In the same scene which was repeated wherever we went, the front room was bare save for a couple or so plastic chairs. The floor was made of shiny clay that I have seen in villages in Malawi, which gives it the appearance and feel of cement. A few possessions hang by a small table in a corner. The wife brought us hot tea and *mandazi*. They were quite proud of their son who could speak English, which he excitedly practiced with me. He is in standard 7. He wants to be a lawyer, he said confidently.

Next we went to Gowodolhi village where we also stopped by a house of a member of the SEWS board. He had just been working on the farm and his feet were steeped in mud. His wife also brought us tea and some snacks. Their generosity puts to shame many of us who have the means but couldn't care less to be hospitable. Like the couple in the first village, they were astonished to hear that I was from Africa and that I had come to learn about their history. Were they that important, I could see the question in their eyes as they talked about their harsh lives. From there we drove to Gadagera where the primary school that Bosco built is located. The land was donated by a woman who had lost her husband but wanted to do something for the community. She serves as a guardian for the school and we ran into her. We walked across the newly planted rice fields, in the middle of which there is a piped borehole where two women were getting water. At the school, we met several of the teachers, all recent university graduates, two of whom were women. A white woman suddenly disappeared into a bathroom. Bosco explained that the district frequently brought such teachers from abroad who were not really too keen on working with him. In fact, they were resisting his plans to add upper level classes and to have all the teachers possess education degrees. The current Siddi teachers had BAs in fields other than education. This was another way of trying to block educational progress for the Siddis. The school has yet to receive official registration. Kids in smartly pressed uniforms were running all over the grass and some were waiting for lunch in a building next to the main two-story school building.

Then we drove to drop Bosco off at a place where one of his former students, who now has a master's degree in computer science, is trying to set up a honey-making business

to help Siddi honey producers and cut out the exploitative middlemen. Bosco apologized that he couldn't spend the rest of the day with us because he had to get ready to take 60 kids to schools in Bangalore later tonight. He hoped that I would spread the word about the Siddi community and especially the struggles to educate its children, and that perhaps we could facilitate linkages for them with African institutions and further education in the U.S. I was deeply impressed by his unflinching commitment to Pan-African solidarity, one that is simultaneously based on strategic thinking and practical action.

For the rest of the day, we continued our visits to other Siddi villages and settlements dozens of kilometers apart. But first, we stopped in Yellapur for lunch. My young companions found it fascinating that I like Indian food. Without Bosco, they opened up more, telling me of their hopes and dreams for themselves and their community. Jairan talked of their plans to form a Siddi students association that would help new Siddi students going to college and provide a forum for collective planning and action to improve the welfare of Siddi students. Jumma offered to coordinate the writing of a short report on Siddis that I could publish on my website. They wanted the world to know about them that they were proud Indians of African descent. We discussed their admiration of Barack Obama, what his victory meant to them as black people, how proud and empowered they felt. I was impressed about how knowledgeable they seemed about African Americans and even African affairs. They certainly followed the visits of African-American celebrities to India. They mentioned the visit of the Williams sisters and their father and Martin Luther King, III. They only wished these visiting dignitaries knew about the Siddis, or even better still, visited the places where the Siddis lived. That would surely raise the profile of the Siddis and improve their standing in India because Indians respect and admire America.

After lunch, we drove to Arabail, a forest area where Remuka's sister lives. It was spectacularly beautiful, the mountains and valleys all thickly carpeted with luxurious tropical trees and foliage. We parked the car by the road and walked down to the house, around which were fruit trees including bananas, mangoes, bread fruit, and palm. It was quite breathtaking. But nature's abundance was not matched by the material abundance of the household, which looked much poorer than the houses we had visited earlier in the other villages. But the generosity was the same. We were served tea and Indian snacks, including fried bread fruit. A neighbor farther down joined us and she invited us to her home, a thatched house. We were served tea and fresh fruits of pineapples and bread fruit. Unfortunately, her parents were both ill. Her father did manage to come out, a frail man covered in a blanket. I shook his hand and he stared at me intensely when they told him I was from Africa. The mother had suffered a stroke several years ago and she was down with a fever. In fact, her brother, who came to greet us and walked up to the car, was also not feeling too well. Save for the accent and Indian dress, I could be with these people anywhere in some remote settlement in Africa.

We then drove back to Yellapur to meet with the leaders of the Siddi Development Association who we had missed earlier. The President and Vice-President briefed me on the activities of the association and objectives to increase awareness, coordinate and lobby for government assistance, and run a business of honey and other forestry products. They were curious how I could be of assistance to them. I half expected that and I talked about my role as a teacher. I could best contribute to Bosco's educational programs in that role in ways that were feasible and most appropriate. When I listened to Bosco, I decided to find ways of assisting to raise funds for the society, although I did not make him an explicit promise to that effect. The two leaders looked about my age but they were much taller

and more robust, physically. They asked the secretary who was sitting by in the small office to bring us bananas and drinks. And they offered me a gift of a bottle of honey. I didn't know how to reciprocate. I thought giving them money might be offensive, so I just thanked them.

Finally, we went to Kendalgira, Jumma's home village, which was more than 30 kilometers away from Yellapur. While much of the drive earlier had been through forest groves and on good tarmac roads, the drive to the last village was on terrible potholed dirt roads punctuated by patches of tarmac, or the other way around, but across rolling rice paddies and the occasional fields of sugarcane and fruit groves, which were spectacular to look at. Far less appealing were the crouched torsos of men and women working the fields.

It had been raining off and on for much of the afternoon so the air was cool and became even cooler as night approached. On the way, the driver picked up a bunch of school kids and dropped them off at the next villages. In fact, for much of the evening he began to operate a taxi service, which nearly made us miss our train. By the time we got to Jumma's village, it was dusk. It was the biggest village I had seen so far, and perhaps the most well-off. His parents' house has a veranda, the large front room had a double bed and in a corner was a television. We were served tea and snacks. His father, a sturdy man of more than six feet tall, who was wearing a turban and a lungi, shook my hands firmly, while his mother who was wearing a green sari clasped my hands with both her hands and touched her shoulders and forehead as if in prayer. This is a Muslim community. A bunch of kids came in, some keen to practice the few words of English they knew, including adorable four- or five-year-old girls who kept coming and saying, "how are you?"

The drive back was less enjoyable because I was becoming a little anxious about time. We dropped Remuka off in Yellapur and Jairam and Gonapart at another junction. The taxi driver's spitting and fondness for loud Hindu, or some other Indian language, music was quite unpleasant. Several times I had to ask Jumma, who was sitting up front with him, to tone it down. We didn't get to the train station until 10:20 p.m., twenty minutes before departure. I paid the taxi driver and dashed for the train.

To avoid what happened last night, we made sure to ask for clear directions to the right platform for our train. This time we were not so lucky with the compartment, it was for six, not four people, three on each side on top of each other. The man next to me asked where I was from. I told him I was a foreigner but Jumma was his countryman. He frowned. Siddi, he asked. Jumma nodded. At least he knew about Siddis. Both yesterday and today the students mentioned that they get that question all the time because people can't believe that they are Indian. Where are you from, where did you learn to speak Indian languages so well? From surprise, the man turned into condescension. The Siddi are very poor people, he said talking to me. You saw how they live, terrible. I didn't think they should be defined by their poverty in a country where the vast majority of people are desperately poor as well, many even far worse than the Siddi. Certainly, the living conditions of the Siddi did not approach those of the slum dwellers in Mumbai and across India's major cities. He revealed that he used to be a policeman in North Karnataka and frequently dealt with the Siddis. He made a point of stressing the Siddi women prostitutes he caught. I tuned him out. Fortunately, he didn't snore.

June 23, 2009

I slept soundly. I even said good morning to the policeman, a short, dark-skinned man. He revealed that his son had just returned with an MBA from the University of Michigan. The U.S., which he has never visited, gave us a point of reference. I couldn't help taking a dig at him by referring to Obama. I wonder whether a Siddi can become president in India like Obama in the U.S. That startled him—a question mark of horror crossed his face. He gave me a weak smile. Perhaps to show his lack of racial bias or simple generosity he offered to drop me at the hotel in his car. I gave Jumma some money, both to thank him for spending the last two days with me and showing me around the Siddi villages and for his transportation costs. I assured him I would keep in touch. Okay, uncle, he said, and gave me an anxious smile. Work hard and get yourself that law degree. Yes, I will, the smile widened.

The morning traffic was already heavy. The policeman raved that his son got all A-pluses in his courses. His pride was touching and I could relate as a parent but I wanted to find out more about Bangalore. Crime is higher here than in many Indian cities, including Mumbai which is several times bigger, he said in response to my question on the subject. This is because of high property values, he explained, itself a product of the lucrative IT industry, which is concentrated in the city. He used to be Deputy Commissioner of Police in the city, he said. I wondered what he was now. "Nice meeting you professor," he said as his driver pulled by the hotel entrance. I thanked him.

I had enjoyed the trip, but it felt good to be back at the hotel for its conveniences. I took a long, lazy shower before going for breakfast where I lingered for a while as I read the day's newspapers. I was hoping to see the two Africans I met last Sunday and the black woman I saw at a distance sharing breakfast with a white woman. But they didn't turn up. Most of the people in the restaurant were white and Indian men eating by themselves.

After breakfast, I thought of going to a shop and buy a cap to replace the one I had inadvertently forgotten yesterday at Jumma's parents' house when his mother clasped my hands to say good bye and I had to put my cap on the chair. But when I got back to the room, the idea of a nap seemed more appealing.

About Jumbe came to see me at the hotel at 3:00 p.m. as we had agreed. A PhD student in environmental science at Bangalore University, his contact information had been given to me by Professor Ibrahim Noor, one of my contacts in Muscat, Oman. I have been in touch with Prof. Noor but have not yet met him. I learned in the course of our three-hour meeting that he is one of Aboud's mentors. He has a wife and two kids and he carries a historical name: his grandfather was the President of Zanzibar between 1972 and 1984. I was keen to meet him to learn more about African students,

He is deeply steeped in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and African politics, subjects on which he gave insightful comments. He is concerned about the future of the union between Zanzibar and the mainland, the dangers of resurrected racialized politics if Zanzibar is to secede, which to him doesn't make sense since the peoples of the island are so intermingled. He worries that the current crop of politicians is abandoning Mwalimu Nyerere's nationalist vision and nation-building project as they focus on narrow regional and ethnic interests. The young people are no better as they sacrifice political consciousness to material consumption. He is troubled that the dream of east African unity, let alone African unity, is still far from realization. But he is hopeful, he insisted, that the future of Tanzania and Africa could be transformed for the better. One cannot give up, one has

to do one's best to work with progressive social forces, which are definitely there even if currently overshadowed by the more retrogressive neo-liberal and sectarian forces. I could hear the voice of a child of politicians and a possible future politician.

I was particularly interested in hearing Aboud's views on India. He has been here for nearly nine years. He did his BA at Delhi University and his MA and PhD, which he has just completed, here at Bangalore University. His views on India are quite critical both in terms of Indian society and politics as well as the ways in which African students are treated in the country. This is a highly divided and unequal society, he noted. The caste system still exercises a powerful hold and, when combined with class divisions, creates an explosive mix bubbling under the surface of apparent calm. He is appalled by the silence he encounters, the false placidity you see among Indians. Behind that mask is a vicious, patriarchal and highly controlled society. He mentioned his supervisor, a highly accomplished woman who has yet to be made professor because, he is convinced, she is a woman. More troubling is the demeanor she adopts when he visits her home where she becomes a demure, subservient wife who cooks for and serves guests including him. He has observed that it doesn't seem to matter how high people from the lower castes might rise through education and professional advancement. Those from the higher castes in the same positions and sometimes even lower ones seem to expect and often get social deference.

He has confronted several of his Indian friends about this and he never seems to get satisfactory answers. Violence of course periodically shatters these silences and rigid social inequalities that have been reinforced by India's economic liberalization in recent years in which the poor are losing out even more to the rich, especially with regard to land. This, essentially, is what is behind the Naxalite insurgency, which started in the late 1960s but has intensified in recent years so that today they operate in many parts of rural India beyond West Bengal where they started. Some estimates indicate that they operate in nearly 40% of the country and the government has declared them the most serious threat to national security.

He was equally critical of the way African students are treated in India. He found it ironic that Indians, including the government, are currently complaining about how Indian students are being treated in Australia and accuse Australians of racism when they, in fact, treat African students here in the same way. They are expected to report to the police within a month of their arrival with proof of college registration and financial sustainability. That didn't seem to me different from practices in North America and western Europe, where this is often done before one even gets a student visa to go there. Also familiar was his complaint that Indian students betray insufferable arrogance and ignorance about Africa. More troubling were his stories about how African students are sometimes harassed by the police. He told the story of a Tanzanian female student who was thrown in jail together with other African students who had been partying at a farm house. Such parties are held to circumvent restrictions on dancing in city establishments that close by 11:30 p.m. She was not allowed legal representation and after three days, she lost capacity to move and had had no access to medicines for her asthmatic condition.

African countries' embassies are often unhelpful for African students compared to the embassies of other countries. In any case, British, American, and other students from the rich countries tend to be treated much better; most of them are exchange students. African students come from all over the continent, but the largest numbers are from the former British colonies including Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ghana. But over the last

few years, the number of Ivorian students has increased as well as Ivorian workers in the IT industries who are employed largely because of their French language skills. Not only are the African students divided along national lines, with student associations for each country, they also tend to be divided along regional and ethnic lines, especially countries in conflict such as Cote d'Ivoire and Sudan. They have no contacts with and some don't even have the knowledge that African Indians exist. He was very keen that I give him Bosco's contacts who I talked about with great admiration.

This led us to talk about relations between Africa and its diasporas. Aboud discussed President Obama's election with great excitement, although he was quite aware that it would not lead to fundamental changes. I was fascinated by the points he made that on the night of the election he was called by the media to give a comment. He told his wife that as an African, he suddenly mattered. He was also impressed by the fact that a man of such diverse backgrounds, in terms of race and upbringing, could be elected president by the American electorate. It gave him hope that perhaps Zanzibar, with its long history of population mixing, and across Africa people would learn to elect candidates based on their qualifications and commitment to national development rather than narrow interests.

He noted that he comes from a mixed background. On his father's side, he is descended from Africans and on his mother's side from Arabs and Indians. In fact, his mother lives in Oman now and he has cousins there, too. Oman actually has a large population of people who relocated from Zanzibar after the revolution. This Zanzibari diaspora was crucial in the modernization of Oman after Sultan Qaboos overthrew his conservative father in 1970. But when he visits Oman, Aboud is struck by the fact that he finds little that connects him to his cousins. They seem ill-informed about Zanzibar, which they regard as a backwater and cannot understand why he would want to live there. Nevertheless, the links between Oman and Zanzibar, which are historically strong, persist. Many Zanzibari Omanis invest in Zanzibar. He feels quite strongly that diaspora relations cannot simply be based on race. For one thing, many people in Zanzibar are racially mixed. But he also came to this realization interacting with Tanzanian students of Indian descent in Bangalore. They stick with fellow Tanzanians rather than Indians. A similar phenomenon has been observed among black and white students from the U.S. in African countries. National identities are indeed powerful and diaspora identities sometimes take second place.

He thanked me for letting him come and pay me a visit. When Prof. Noor told him to expect a call from me, he was very excited after he checked me out online. He had heard of my name before and felt honored to be visiting such a great professor, he averred. I was a tad bit embarrassed. I was the one who should be grateful, I told him, for he had widened my understanding of Indian society and diaspora issues from his vantage point as a keen observer who had been in the country for many years. I paid the bill for the tea and he stooped to shake my hand.

This is my last night in India. It has been an incredible experience; it will take me a while to fully process everything. In the end, I have learned as much as I could. From JNU in New Delhi to the Siddi villages of North Karnataka, this has been some intellectual journey!

June 24, 2009

It felt bittersweet leaving the last hotel of my memorable stay in India. The hotel staff was as friendly as ever as I checked out. The hotel car was already waiting outside to take

me to the airport. The driver was courteous and chatty as we drove. He explained the various sections of the city and some of the buildings we drove through. I couldn't have asked for a better ending to my visit to this incredible country.

At the airport, we were met by a staff from the hotel who kindly offered to take me through check in. He rejected my protestations that I could push the cart carrying my bags by myself. When I tried to give him a tip after I had checked in, he refused. I know where I will stay if I ever visit Bangalore again!

I had a two hour wait before flight time, which suited me fine, for it gave me a chance to catch up on the day's papers. *The Deccan Chronicle* led with a story on the Maoists, as the Naxalites are sometimes called. But I was intrigued by the insert on social events and celebrities. There was a two-page spread on matrimonial ads, prospective brides and bridegrooms wanted. I was fascinated by what people listed. I expected people to list their age, education, and even height. But they also listed their color. The dominant descriptions were "wheatish," and "wheatish brown." A few put "fair." There was a gender dynamic: women seeking bridegrooms were more likely to list their color than the men seeking brides. One newspaper's ads are, of course, not a basis for generalization, but it seemed to confirm what I had heard and seen: color obsession is quite pronounced in India.

This is the first Emirates flight I have ever taken. What caught my attention and even impressed me was the diversity of the crew and flight attendants. They were a veritable United Nations, from various Asian countries as well as European and African. This was a befitting introduction to the migrant labor economies of the Gulf, I thought. The flight left exactly on time, 10:30 am. I was far from the window but tried to take one last glimpse of this country I had enjoyed and left me more intrigued than ever. An hour or so later we were out of Indian airspace. In the meantime, they served us a hearty breakfast.

Qatar

June 24, 2009

We landed at Dubai International Airport just before 1:00 p.m. Dubai is a part of the United Arab Emirates, a region in the heart of the Persian Gulf—what the Arabs contentiously prefer to call the Arabian Gulf—the crossroads of ancient empires and trade routes which is currently the largest source of oil in the world and a massive importer of labor from its poor Asian and African neighbors. As befitting a major global business center and the largest city of the UAE, the opulent airport, which has undergone massive upgrades in recent years, offers lovely terminals tastefully stocked with shops and lounges for the cosmopolitan as well as the bewildered travelers.

Among the throngs of passengers were African travelers eagerly spending their last dirham or charging their lives away. The departure gate for my flight was full of silent South and Southeast Asian migrant laborers. When it was boarding time, they nervously presented their passports and additional documentation to the dour official who painstakingly scrutinized them, which made the hapless men even more anxious. When it came to my turn, he hardly flipped through my Canadian passport before letting me proceed. Although the flight lasted barely an hour, we were served light snacks.

Doha International Airport seemed comparatively small, although Qatar is the second-wealthiest country in the world in terms of GDP per capita. Immigration was a breeze. I got my visa, which cost 100 riyals. The immigration officials included both men and women. The women wore *abayas*, the long black garments that cover the body from head to feet, while the men either wore *thawbs*, the long white robes, with their heads covered with head-dresses of black *igals* and white *ghutras*, or they wore uniforms of black pants and light blue short-sleeved shirts. Several were black.

Immediately outside the arrivals hall I saw counters for the major hotels, among them the Intercontinental. A tall, skinny Filipino woman welcomed me and walked me to the taxi stand. I asked her where I could get an ATM machine to withdraw some money. She said I could charge the fare to the hotel when I arrived. That was a new one on me. The drive to the hotel could not have been more different from the drives in India. The traffic was so light, making the streets look deserted. There were hardly any people walking anywhere in the sweltering sun. There were also hardly any trees on the parched, sandy soils. But what the landscape lacked in nature's bounty, the cityscape more than compensated. We drove along the road that hugs the calm, shimmering, blue sea and offers spectacular views of the mushrooming city that seems to be covered by construction filling all the empty spaces between existing skyscrapers. This must be an architect's playground, as the buildings come in all sizes, styles, and shapes—round to square, evoking boxes, bottles, and boats—covered in glittering green or blue glass skins. Some of the buildings are given an Islamic imprint in the forms of domes and intricate geometric façades. The residential areas, with their cream and white houses, wear their Islamic influences even more visibly. It all looked so clean, so orderly, almost sanitized to the point of artificiality.

The hotel is suitably well appointed, befitting the Intercontinental brand. The taxi driver, who hardly talked despite my efforts to engage him, was paid by the hotel for the ride. The hotel staff was appropriately gracious but they lacked the fawning deference of the ones I saw in India. For that reason, it felt a little more familiar. The fact that it was a multicultural staff—Asians, Africans, Europeans—added to the sense of familiarity. And the room is large and elegant.

Once I got settled, I called Rogaia Abushar, my local contact, to tell her I was in town. She suggested we either meet later tonight or tomorrow. I opted for tomorrow. I needed a little time off to decompress from India and get ready for the Gulf.

In the evening I went to the restaurant on the lobby level where, as fate would have it, they were serving an Indian buffet dinner. The restaurant was full and several tables had more than eight or ten people. They looked like business dinners composed mostly of local men in their thawbs and igals, and foreigners, even one who looked black, in suits and shirts. There were also several women in abayas eating by themselves or with their husbands or families. One couple with two children was black. It was of course hard to tell if there were North Africans among the other guests in the restaurant. This is the challenge in this region. The populations of northern African and the Gulf are often indistinguishable and the identities of the northern Africans are unlikely to be framed in African terms and more likely in national terms—as Egyptians, Sudanese, Algerians, and so on. Thus, the terms *black* and *African* as identity constructs may not have, I suspect, much resonance here. This, of course, doesn't invalidate discussing them in terms of African diasporas, but it is important to recognize that this may not be the language of their self-identification. I am curious how they define themselves.

The food was enjoyable, but the bill was forbidding. It cost a whopping 225 riyals, the equivalent of almost 62 dollars! They won't be seeing much of me here! I can't wait to get started.

June 25, 2009

My first full day in Qatar started rather inauspiciously and ended a little better. Rogaia called to say she would drop by the hotel at 5:00 p.m. I had expected to meet her sometime in the morning to go over any schedule she may have worked out for me. One of the frustrations of these trips is that I am sometimes at the mercy of people I have not met before and who are obviously busy with their own affairs and usually don't seem to understand the pressures of time I am working under. She suggested that I could spend the day at the Museum of Islamic Art, which I did.

I discovered, to my pleasant surprise, that the hotel provides free transport to the museum as well as to other places in the city. Together with the free Internet service, it makes up somewhat for the exorbitant food prices.

Only officially opened last November and to the public on December 1, 2008, the museum is a stunning masterpiece designed by the celebrated architect, I. M. Pei; the interior designer was the renowned French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte. It is arguably one of the most important monumental buildings in the Persian Gulf and perhaps even a signature architectural gem of our new century. Located on the tip of the Corniche, which is a man-made island in Doha, overlooking the city's rising picturesque skyline,

the museum offers an inspired modern representation of Islamic architecture. In the museum guidebook, Pei is quoted as drawing from the Ahmad Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo built in 876–879 after scouring the Muslim world for “the essence of Islamic architecture.” From the entrance at the edges of the shore, you walk up broad stairs lined with palm trees that provide much needed shade from the cruel Doha summer sun. The cascading water running in the middle of the two boulevards of stairs provides soothing sounds that swallow the roar of the traffic behind and seems to prepare you to focus on the tranquil grandeur of the imposing museum in front of you and its extensive storage and exquisite display of Islamic art inside.

The exterior marble façade of bold geometric shapes, comprised of rectangles, triangles, and an arc, kiss the shifting sun and smile in the shimmering waters, playfully changing colors from cream to faint gold in the process. The interior boasts its own spatial and decorative complexities, from the breathtaking dome and the massive chandelier that hangs below it to the sculpted, grand stairs and the gentle waterfalls and the galleries, which showcase works of art with both elegant simplicity and sophistication. The first floor boasts a museum shop, a fountain café, and prayer rooms for men and women, as well as an auditorium.

Equally impressive is the art itself, and for me, the inclusive visual language and presentation that encompasses works spanning a thousand years from China to Spain, India to North Africa, and Central to Western Asia—the lands, cultures, and traditions that have constituted Islamic history in all its splendid diversities. In each country I go to I always visit museums, for they tell you a lot about the construction of public memory, the collective imagination of national and civilizational identity. What struck me in this museum was its catholicity; its liberal, broad-mindedness and the lack of exclusionary racial markers that have bedeviled the European-dominated modern world with its hierarchies and solitudes of difference.

Also fascinating for me is the visual language in which the art is executed and enjoyed in ordinary, beautiful objects, from jewelry to coins, bowls to vases, tiles to doors, lamps to bells, daggers to swords, textiles to carpets, inscriptions to illustrations; the aesthetics of the everyday, a testament to the power of art to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. I went through the second and third floors and marveled at the intricate architectural decorations on the mounted panels of carved stone, bricks, tiles, and wood; the textiles and carpets with their complex, figured designs; the paintings and calligraphy emblazoned in books, documents, and canvasses; the epigraphic wares and lustra-painted ceramics from dishes, bowls, jars and bottles; metal objects and decorative inlays including coins, boxes, candlesticks, masks, swords, and scientific instruments such as astrolabes; jewelry made of precious metal and stones and ivory; and glassware from vases to lamps.

The hotel van picked me up from where I had been dropped off. Half an hour after I got back to the hotel, Rogaia came and I went to meet her in the lobby. A tall, lovely woman who laughs easily, she has a sharp intellect and immediately impressed me with her perspective, comments, and insights on a wide range of issues. Born in the Sudan, she grew up in Omdurman. She also knows Ahmed Sikainga, the person who gave me her contact, very well. She said I had been highly spoken of by both Kikainga and Salah Hassan and she had just ordered my two-volume collection, *The Study of Africa*, for one of her graduate seminars. She wanted to know what issues are discussed in the book and the more I elaborated the more she felt she had done the right thing to order them. We launched into a long, predictable diatribe about the hypocrisies and failings of the

Africanists, the way they misconceive African realities, their lack of African language competencies, their aversion to progressive and open political commitments, their careerist uses of Africa and African studies, their uneasy and often antagonistic relations with African scholars and the need for us to create our own networks.

This led to another long tirade about Darfur and the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC), which she attacked for its misguided understanding of the Darfur crisis, which, she maintains, is complex, not that the complexity can be used or seen as an excuse for the genocidal policies of the Bashir dictatorship. She is appalled at the proposed interventions of the Coalition, including Bashir's indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which she believes is not only partial and hypocritical, but Bashir's arrest would not bring the crisis to an end. She approves Mamdani's critique of the Coalition and seemed to echo his line that some Darfurian activists have been co-opted by the Coalition against their best interests and knowledge of the complex dynamics on the ground: the long history of armed conflicts in the region, the misguided racialization of the conflict as one between Arabs and Africans, and the need to develop comprehensive and sustainable solutions based on local agency and conflict resolution strategies.

She is clearly passionate about human rights, from women's rights to democratization. She gave me a copy of her recently published book, *Transforming Displaced Women in Sudan: Politics and the Body in a Squatter Settlement*, which I can't wait to read. She has also published two other books, *Wanderings: Sudanese Migrants and Exiles in North America* and *Female Circumcision: Multicultural Perspectives*, which came out in the Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights, under which my co-edited human rights collection was published. She believes it is important for Africans to intervene vigorously in human rights debates and contribute to the construction of more inclusive human rights discourses and institutional architectures. Key to any meaningful advances in human rights advocacy and cultures is the inclusion of local knowledge and practices. Local agency is particularly fundamental in conflict resolution, and this entails, in large measure, leaving the sense of victimhood behind and pursuing restorative rather than retributive forms of justice. For restorative justice to work it must include transparency, accountability, and commitment by the perpetrators not to repeat their actions. It must be focused on repairing the injustices of the past and forestalling the generation of injustices in the future. The forums through which the perpetrators are brought together, of course, will vary according to local circumstances and contexts.

Periodically we would be interrupted by phone calls during which I would flip through the book Rogaia gave me. I rummaged through her discussions of urgent anthropology and feminist ethnography, which seem to open new analytical avenues on the subject of displaced women and resettlement. I can't wait to read the book.

As we talked, we discovered that we know a lot of people in common. Like me, she has been a nomadic academic. She has taught or been a fellow at Brown, Tufts, and Harvard, and among the people we know in common are Lewis Gordon, Emmanuel Akyeampong, Pearl Robinson, Zine Magubane and her dad, and Peter Agree, an editor at University of Pennsylvania Press. We discussed some of them and found we share high opinions of them all.

I was of course far more interested in the program she had planned for me. She noted that a lot of people were out because of the holidays, which were just starting, but she would do her best to make sure that I talked to some informed people, including a librarian at the University of Qatar. She would confirm everything tomorrow. She gave me a broad

overview of the African presence in the Gulf. She said it was important to understand the complex demography of the region before the creation of the modern state in which there was continuous movement of people from and into the region from the neighboring Asian and African regions. Ethiopia, for example, has had long-standing demographic connections with the Gulf. There were also movements specifically connected to the pilgrimages to Mecca that brought people from as far as West Africa, some who settled in what they considered the promised land. The literature on pilgrimage and the establishment of these settlements—the *mujawara*—would yield a lot of important information. There were also those Africans who came as guards, some who, if they worked in the inner sanctums of power, were emasculated, which raises interesting questions about migration and masculinity. Many of these guards were of Ethiopian origin. Then there were also those Africans who came as slaves. Qataris generally don't like to discuss this aspect of their history.

What Rogaia finds intriguing about Qatar, and perhaps the region as a whole, is the multilayered nature of discourses of tolerance in which difference is not stigmatized as it often is in the United States, for example. She has been struck in her classes by the way in which Afro-Qatari students accommodate incoming African students, addressing them with genuine filial affection as brothers and sisters. This tolerance and accommodation extends to people of different sexual orientation and even prisoners, who are not called prisoners but residents in prison and given training for full reintegration. There is a deep-seated aversion to humiliating other people, so that imprisonment is often seen as punishment enough without adding degrading treatment, as is the tendency in the West.

We concluded by returning to the subject of knowledge production and public engagement, the imperative of producing actionable "knowledges," knowledges that simultaneously embody penetrating analysis and are comprehensible, not simply to disciplinary insiders but to the general public. We both lamented the ascendancy of pretentious theory and turgid writing in the social sciences and humanities. Happily, she noted that, for her field, the growth of public anthropology was curtailing some of the worst manifestations of the infatuation with theory and intellectual navel gazing. The need for clear writing was always emphasized by her father, who was a professional writer and journalist. She also recalled a famous statement made by a leader of the Sudanese Communist Party to his comrades when they complained that the peasants did not understand. He told them the problem was with them, not with the peasants: they needed to learn to communicate better and realize that the peasants knew their situation better than they did.

As I paid the bill for the cappuccino I ordered, she suggested that it would be a good idea if we get a small team of like-minded people to organize a network that could arrange an interdisciplinary workshop on diasporas, culture, migrations and "Africanity" today. And perhaps we could plan to produce an encyclopedia on African diasporas that fully incorporates African diasporas around the world, including Asia and this part of the world. By the time she was ready to leave, I realized we had been talking for nearly four hours. We both remarked that it felt like we had always known each other. I look forward to talking to her more and, in fact, doing a formal interview with her. It didn't seem like a bad end to my first day.

For dinner, I ordered room service of a reasonably priced dinner. Then I watched a little TV. I hadn't seen Al-Jazeera, which is based here in Qatar, since last December and January when I was on holiday in Malawi and South Africa. It was a little refreshing to be free from the predictable pontifications of CNN and the BBC.

June 26, 2009

It was a rather low-key day, although quite fun. I spent much of the afternoon at the city center, which essentially means the mall, for besides the gleaming towers, there seems to be nothing people-oriented worth visiting. And given the scorching heat, I can understand why the air-conditioned mall might be an attractive public square, a place to see people and to be seen.

This being Friday afternoon, it was indeed packed. It is a large mall with four long floors, an underground parking garage, and a kids' playground and a cinema on one of the top floors. The cinema was showing mostly Hollywood blockbusters such as *Transformers*, *The Proposal*, *Cassandra's Dream*, *Terminator Salvation*, *Angels and Demons*, and *Taking Pelham*, featuring Denzel Washington and John Travolta, and one Hindi film, *New York*. None of them seemed remotely interesting, except perhaps the one featuring Denzel because of his very presence. Having found Nollywood, Hollywood's appeal has waned dramatically for me.

Many of the shops, coffee shops and restaurants, had familiar names including Starbucks, KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, Chili's, Nando's and TCBY. I didn't see any that didn't look like a fast food joint. This is one area where, in comparison, South African malls stand out; there some of the best restaurants are located in malls. Most of the men and boys were in crisp white thwabs and immaculately folded ghutras, while the women wore black abayas with varying degrees of coverage, including facial veils and accessories. There were also many people in ordinary dresses, pants, shirts, and even suits. The people themselves were a motley collection of Arabs, Asians, and Africans with a sprinkling of Europeans, and all the complex mixtures in between. I had to remind myself not to stare at the black Qataris in their pristine Islamic dress talking in Arabic. I saw a handful of black teens in oversized shorts and T-shirts and heard a group of men in low fades and a black couple who wore permanent smiles for each other speaking in African-American accents.

A truly buzzing bazaar, I thought, of shoppers and people just hanging out, men and women sitting by the open restaurants, together or separately, some with children, chatting, talking on cell phones, reading newspapers, or lost in silence. I walked around looking for a cap. After going through several shops I finally found one—a white cap, which I thought would fit nicely with my white summer outfits, including the kurta I bought in Mumbai. I stopped by Coffee Cottage where I ordered a cappuccino and a snack and sat to watch the social rhythms of the crowd.

After spending more than two hours there, I went to the entrance and sat by the edges of the waterfalls to wait for the hotel van. I tried to wait outside but I am not a glutton for heat punishment.

Rogaia came with a friend from the university, Marwa Maziad, an Egyptian who specializes in the sociology of communication, political economy, and globalization in Egypt, the U.S., South Africa, Turkey and Qatar. She got her MA from the University of Washington at Seattle. She is planning to go for her PhD in the next couple of years. She grew up in Egypt, but seems to have become quite Americanized, at least in terms of accent.

They took me to the Corniche, perhaps the most striking part of the city with its astounding views of the bay. We hired a boat to take us around. The soft splashes of water,

the lights bathing the skyscrapers on one side and the low buildings on the other, together with the Qatari music and the relenting evening heat made for a blissful ride. We swayed to the music and the waves, oblivious to everything save for the captivating beauty of the night.

They refused my offer to pay, but bargained hard with the boat owner when we were dropped off. Then we walked along the Corniche, past families enjoying the pleasant night, some with their laptops (online services are apparently available everywhere in the city for free), and past the Sheraton Park, to the Sheraton Hotel, the pyramid-shaped iconic building that, until recently, dominated the Corniche. Now it is being dwarfed by the skyscrapers soaring around it. We went into the hotel for a late light meal. It oozes luxury everywhere—the lobby, the restaurants, the sofas and chairs, the lamps and chandeliers, and even the clientele. Rogaia explained that this remains a favorite of Doha's elites and expatriates.

I ordered a Caesar salad with smoked salmon and Marwa had a hamburger. Rogaia only took water, saying she had eaten her dinner just before she came to pick me up. For much of the evening we mostly discussed light subjects and joked around. Marwa wanted to know more about my research and I explained what I was trying to do. All was well until I mentioned my visit to the Museum of Islamic Art and my impressions of its inclusivity. She suggested I was wrong to think Islam was inclusive. It was abusive of women. I was a little taken aback by the vehemence of her response, for I had merely referred to civilizational inclusivity, not gender. I of course agreed with much of what she said about the damage that Islamists in Egypt and other Muslim societies has done to women's rights and freedoms. Sexual harassment is on the rise despite claims that veiling would restore women's honor.

They both noted that older women could not understand their daughters who seemed to acquiesce, even eagerly embrace Islamism, which curtails the freedoms that the older generations had fought so hard for. This apparent inter-generational feminist dissonance, and in some cases discord, is of course not confined to the Islamic world, I added, as it can also be seen in the United States. In her disillusionment with her friends who had adopted Islamic dress and other forms of Islamic practices, as well as Mubarak's venal dictatorship, Marwa seems to have become not only anti-Islamic but anti-Egyptian. She doesn't seem to have much interest in returning to Egypt to live permanently. The line between rejection of specific religious and political tendencies and repudiation of a religion and a country is of course thin, especially for a relatively young academic.

Of greater fascination for me was her take on her life in Qatar. She noted that there is a hierarchy of status among immigrants in the country. Among the Arabs, the Lebanese are at the top and the Egyptians near the bottom, primarily because the latter are still largely confined to the public sector bureaucracy while the former are more involved in the buoyant entrepreneurial sectors. She is treated quite differently compared to other Egyptians because of her new American identity. She is close enough in terms of language and ethnic identity, but distant because of her Americanness, which gives her the freedom to engage and disengage on her own terms, the space to be herself without being totally alienated from society. So she is able to dress as she sees fit without questions being asked. She was wearing a khaki skirt and a tight top. The more she talked the more I became intrigued by her. I wondered how long she had actually lived in the U.S. and whether both of her parents or one of them were now American citizens. I didn't want to sound too nosey, so I didn't ask. Unfortunately, tomorrow she is going to Oman so I won't have a chance to find out.

We were picked up by the same driver and in the same car that had dropped us off several hours earlier. He came with another woman in the car who I didn't have a chance

to see because she was sitting in the back seat but I was introduced to her. I couldn't make out her accent, but from the conversation she seemed well travelled. I thanked them and Rogaia promised to call in the morning with the plans for the day. I looked at my watch and I was taken aback: it was nearly 11:30 p.m.

June 27, 2009

I waited in vain the whole morning for Rogaia's call. I tried to occupy myself by reading the local paper, *The Peninsula*, which, like the economy, seems to have little domestic content in terms of sources for news stories and the opinion essays. The stories came from the usual feeds, Reuters and AP, which I can get on my website or Google, while the opinions are reprints from American and European papers, which I can read online. The television news channels were full of Michael Jackson's death, on which I wrote a blog yesterday arguing that as a black man he died a long time ago.

In the end, I forced myself to call Rogaia. She apologized, saying she was planning to call me once she heard from a Sudanese driver who she had arranged to come and take me to one of the neighborhoods with a large immigrant African community. A few minutes later she called back to say they would come to pick me up around 4:00 p.m. I felt rather annoyed, more with myself than with her for being dependent like this. She is in the midst of moving apartments to be closer to her new job at the branch campus of Georgetown University.

They came later than they had promised. By then I was beyond annoyance; I just wanted to salvage something of the day. She did look like she had been busy. I felt sorry for imposing myself on her. The drive to Maizzer passed mostly through residential neighborhoods. Most of the houses looked new and many were under construction. There were hardly any trees in sight and one could almost see the waves of the hot, humid air. But the houses, which try to fuse the traditional with the modern, seem to match their colors so seamlessly with the patched soils to create a serene, almost seductive, beauty.

When we got to the neighborhood, Rogaia and the driver showed me a couple of Ethiopian restaurants that were popular gathering places for Africans, especially Sudanese and Ethiopians. Rogaia had come because the driver doesn't speak English and she wanted to make sure we made proper arrangements where I could be picked up and returned to the hotel. I chose the second restaurant, which looked a lot more welcoming and was already full of people. Rogaia even took the trouble of introducing me to the restaurant owner. She was a young Ethiopian woman with the kind of entrancing beauty that Ethiopian women seem to possess in exceptional abundance. Before settling in the restaurant, I decided to walk around the street, which is called Al Muaither and is lined with shops on both sides, including hair salons, tailoring shops, grocery and food marts, hardware and furniture stores, confectionary stores and restaurants of all types. I entered one shop, a Moroccan tailoring store, where I saw stunningly beautiful dresses. When I entered, the owner asked if I was from India. There was an army of Indians in the back at the sewing machines. I shook my head, and with one look at the prices I was out of the door. Most of the tailoring stores seemed to be making thwabs.

When I returned to the Ethiopian restaurant nearly three quarters of an hour later, two of the young men invited me to join them and share their coffee and popcorn. They worked

in the restaurant, had seen me earlier, and were taking a break. They told me there are now many Ethiopians in Qatar. Most of them work in service jobs, especially as drivers, whereas many of the women are domestics. They usually come here with the intention of staying a few years and then going back, but some end up staying longer than they planned. Overall, most of the Ethiopians they know have been here less than five years, they themselves have lived in Qatar for three years. Some people say the number of Ethiopians in the country may be 10,000 or even 12,000. As far as they were concerned, life is good here. They, however, lamented the fact that last year Ethiopia broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar over alleged Qatari support for Eritrea. Overall, the squabble among the two governments had not had much effect on the Ethiopians in Qatar.

But the restaurant owner was far less charitable. I talked to her at length when the two young men resumed their duties. I decided to order some food, a dish of *doro wat*, chicken stew, served atop *injera*. A plate of salad was served separately. The food was brought on a *mesob*. Before the food arrived, a can of burning incense was brought for me to blow to my face. The food was quite delicious. Good?, the woman asked after I had finished. Excellent, I said. She has only been in Qatar for seven months, although she once lived in Dubai, which she liked better because it is a much bigger city and less restrictive. This is because Dubai is a world-class commercial center with business people coming from all over the world, she said. Here there isn't as much business, it's all about oil and gas and they don't treat foreigners well. Each country is given a quota of people who can be allowed to come. It was still okay for Ethiopians, but you should see the wages foreigners are paid here, the ordinary workers not the big time expatriates who make good money. Some workers are paid as little as 800 riyals a month. In the case of maids, the excuse is that they are provided housing and food, but they sometimes work from dawn to midnight. It's nothing but slavery, she said. Qatari employers are mean; they think they can treat people from other countries as slaves. She used the word *slave* several times in our conversation.

Business is good, she smiled when I asked her. She came from Atlanta, Georgia to accompany her husband who accepted a contract. They will return to Atlanta once his contract is over in another two and a half years. She misses Atlanta, where they have a nice big house that would be absolutely out of their price range here. I mentioned that my daughter lives in Atlanta and she commiserated with me when I told her she was still looking for a job. The job market is terrible in Atlanta, she said, and she advised me to tell her to come to Chicago. I tried that, I said. She nodded with ill-disguised pity.

The restaurant started filling up again and she excused herself. I ordered coffee and I enjoyed it as much as the elaborate ceremony that involved the burning of frankincense and servings in tiny cups. The young woman who sat to serve it seemed anxious to practice her English with me. As much as I could tell, she has been in Doha for two years and used to work as a maid before she got this job. She is 25. When I told her that she was my daughter's age, she shook her head vigorously. I looked 29 or 30, she said laughing. She pretty much confirmed the poor working conditions for domestic workers.

In the course of the three or so hours that I was in the restaurant, I saw dozens of people come and go. They were mostly men, some who lingered long after they had finished eating and watching television, which they kept switching between Sudanese and Ethiopian channels. The few women who came in were mostly young and with their boyfriends. I talked to several of the older men. One bore an eerie resemblance to the former Ethiopian dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam. He is a technician in a gas company. He came here to make enough money to build a house back home. He is here alone and

misses his family very much. But he occasionally gets visits from relatives who live elsewhere in the Gulf—in Dubai and Oman, which are nearby. As he warmed up, he said he has relatives in Sweden, Canada, and the U.S. They often keep in touch because these days it is easy to do so through e-mail and texting. This was a clear demonstration of the transnationalization and digitalization of Africa's new diasporas.

Another man I talked to was Sudanese and an official in a government ministry. He came to this restaurant to be around people from the Horn of Africa, he said. He has been in Qatar for seven years and he lives with his family. He gets good pay but accommodations eats up nearly half of his salary. Qataris have it much easier because they are offered special subsidies to purchase or build houses. Housing is extremely expensive here. He wasn't sure how long he would stay here, but he was clearly not in a hurry to return to Sudan. Things are not good there, he lamented, the government is corrupt and money from the country's new-found oil wealth is not trickling down. The country desperately needs peace so that it can begin to concentrate on development. When I asked him how the older and newer Sudanese communities get along, he said it all depends, but overall, people try to work together. Even the Sudanese here get along well with Ethiopians and Egyptians.

The last person I talked to was, in fact, an Egyptian wearing a thwab but without the head-dress. Egyptians constitute perhaps the largest group of people from Africa in Qatar, he said. They have been coming here for a long time. But even those who are settled here try to maintain linkages with Egypt. Egyptians used to dominate the civil service and the professions, but now they are subject to quotas like other countries. I was getting warmed up to ask more questions when he suddenly lowered his head and whispered, can you spare 30 riyals, I seemed to have misplaced my wallet. It was so sudden that I almost gasped loudly. I am sorry, I said, I don't have enough on me. I decided to take another walk and told the restaurant owner I would be back and to ask the driver to wait for me if he came before I returned. I walked by the first Ethiopian restaurant and saw it was now packed with people, mostly Africans.

When I returned, I didn't have to wait long before the driver came with a friend. He spoke the few words of English he could muster and added some Arabic slowly as if that would make me understand. When it was clear this was not the case, he switched to talking to his friend until he got a phone call and his calm voice suddenly turned to screaming. What the hell?, I said to myself. Ten minutes later, he put the phone down. Sorry, he smiled foolishly, "wife." "Oh," I muttered, not sure what else to say. He resumed his conversation with his friend, accompanied by a lot of laughter. I thanked him and shook his hand vigorously when we got to the hotel. Bye, he said, which his friend repeated when he came to the front seat.

I guess the day could have been worse. One has to be grateful for small mercies. The Abyssinian Restaurant, as it is called, had saved the day.

June 28, 2009

This was a truly productive day at last. I took the hotel car service to Qatar University where I had an appointment with Dr. Mohamed Abdallah at 11:00 a.m., arranged by Rogaia. The driver, a pleasant Filipino man who has been here for four years, kept getting lost, so that a trip that should have taken 10 minutes, at most, took more than 40 minutes!

He initially mistakenly took me to the College of the North Atlantic Qatar and kept going round Doha's roundabouts, sometimes twice. Since there were no people on the road to ask, luck finally took us on the road to Qatar University.

Dr. Abdallah is a librarian and he was waiting for me. I was twenty minutes late. A dark-skinned man from Northern Sudan, he has been in Qatar for four years and lives with his wife and three kids. Rogaia had explained the nature of my research and, after the introductions, he went to call several students to come to talk to me. The first student was Lukman Rajih, who is studying Sharia law. He noted that there are a lot of West African students here studying business, law, engineering and Sharia. He seemed to have some difficulties with English and initially thought I was interested in learning about Islam in Africa. On Qatar, he didn't seem to have anything particularly profound to say, except that he volunteered to do an extensive search of materials on Afro-Qataris that he would e-mail me later tonight or tomorrow; for that, I was grateful.

He noted that this is a closed society; a refrain I kept hearing the whole day. They may interact with you in school and at work, but Qataris never take you to their homes. Overall, they tend to keep foreigners and new immigrants at arm's distance. They are generally not well travelled, certainly not when it comes to Africa. While they tend to think highly of Europe and America, Africa is held in very low esteem. They think of Africa only in terms of disease and pathology; they don't even think there are cars or hotels there, and they don't believe it when Africans here tell them about the diversity, richness, and even levels of development of the continent's various countries. Qataris generally have a high sense of superiority *vis-a-vis* foreigners. This is particularly pronounced among the wealthy families and their offspring who have a strong sense of entitlement. In classes, they behave with insufferable arrogance and when an African student scores higher than them, they are surprised and they don't like it. So, conflicts do take place. They show little curiosity about other countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Abdallah would occasionally intervene to provide additional insights and elaborations. I was curious whether the attitudes described by Lukman applied to the Afro-Qataris. He agreed and noted that from his experience there is little difference among the white and black Qataris, as he called them, towards foreigners in general and Africans in particular. He noted that the old Afro-Qatari communities have been here for centuries; that they came before the British. They mostly worked in the pearl industry, which was a major industry in the Gulf and Qatar as well. Before the invention of cultured pearls in Japan in the 1930s, pearl production involved diving deep into the ocean to retrieve oysters containing pearls. His impression is that many black Qataris don't like to be associated with Africa, Africans, and their African origins, preferring to be regarded as Arab instead. They are of course Arab or Arabized, but their ancestors came from Africa. The black Qataris have retained their distinctive physical features because there is little intermarriage between them and other Qataris.

Perhaps the most wide-ranging and insightful analysis of Qatari society was provided by Mohamed Eneil Mohammed, a tall, cheerful student of Sudanese descent who is studying civil engineering. As a Qatari-born black person whose parents came from the Sudan, he understands both the Qatari and foreign communities—Africans and Afro-Qataris. He is extremely well-informed and articulate. He began by observing that the Sudanese have been coming to Qatar for a long time. Many came as highly educated professionals who, like the Egyptians, dominated the public sector and professions as politicians, teachers, government officials, and bankers. In many cases, they built these professions in Qatar, such as the police force, and they rose to high positions. Some stayed in Qatar

and became Qatari. His father was one of them. They maintained strong contacts with Sudan and continued to claim Sudanese nationality. They would visit Sudan regularly, and before the tightening of migration laws and Qatarization, they would bring relatives. Many of course had originally come only to work and stay for a short period, but ended up settling permanently.

Abdallah intervened with interesting information about the size and composition of the Sudanese population in Qatar. He noted that there are an estimated 30,000 Sudanese in Qatar and that few of them are from the south of Sudan. This might be attributed to problems of language and religion. Northern Sudanese like himself tend both to speak Arabic and to be Muslim. Nevertheless, the southern Sudanese who come to Qatar tend to be highly educated and to occupy high positions. Many come with educational qualifications from Europe and North America that are highly valued here.

Mohamed resumed talking about the inter-generational dynamics among the Sudanese settled in Qatar. His parents' generation is still strongly attached to the Sudan. They tend to idealize their homeland, thinking of it as the best and a measure against which to judge Qatar. His father, for example, is very critical of what he regards as Qatar's wasteful expenditures on the University or Education City, which I passed through yesterday on the way to Maizzer where American universities such as Cornell, Georgetown, Texas A & M, Carnegie Mellon, and Northwestern are establishing branch campuses. He was also critical of the construction of the stadium and other sports infrastructure for the 2006 Asian Games held in Qatar. He keeps saying this money would be better used in Sudan where people are suffering from poverty and hunger. Mohamed believes people of his father's generation must know the situation in their countries of origin is not the best, but, in an effort to cling to their national identities, they refuse to acknowledge it.

It is different for Mohamed's generation; they were born here, they belong here. They know the society, culture, and customs more than their parents ever will. They speak the local slang and are fully integrated into the society through education and the fact that they grew up here. The younger generation, those aged 13–14, is even more assimilated, totally absorbed in Qatari society. They don't know the languages, history, and politics of the Sudan. Mohamed told the story of a young Sudanese girl who went to Sudan with her parents and observed, "there are a lot of Sudanese people here," oblivious to the fact that she was in fact in the Sudan! Not surprisingly, Mohamed's generation does not maintain strong contacts with the Sudan. There was a time when many Sudanese Qatari students liked to go to Sudan, but these days many tend to stay for much shorter periods—only a year or so—because they find social conditions and standards of living quite low compared to what they are used to in Qatar. They end up feeling more attached to Qatar. He is amazed at the pressures put on Sudanese returnees and his father's generation. They are regarded as rich people and everybody expects them to help in improving the lives of the extended family—sending kids to school, building houses, providing capital for businesses. Even the government regards them as pockets of money. The Sudanese embassy charges exorbitant fees for them to renew their passports and visas. Some people are even forced to lie about their positions by claiming to be laborers in order to reduce the taxes they are expected to pay the Sudanese government, Abdallah added. Mohammed told a popular joke about a mosquito who, after sucking the blood of a local Sudanese and an expatriate Sudanese, expressed his preference for the latter's blood for its great flavor!

He explained that some of the changes between the older and younger generations of Sudanese residents and citizens of Qatar could be attributed to changes in Qatari society.

In the past this was a far more closed society than it is now; new migrants tended to encounter Qataris at work and other public spaces. But now, as the society has become more open due to rapid economic development, interactions are more pronounced. He noted that there are differences between Qataris in urban areas and those in the rural areas who are pursuing a Bedouin way of life. Depending on their own backgrounds as nomads, some Sudanese have good relations with the Bedouins. Overall, the Sudanese have good relations with Qatar. In the past, the Sudanese tended to be concentrated in specific communities; now they tend to be more scattered and integrated, certainly amongst the Sudanese Qataris.

He talked at length about the conditions of black Qataris and their relations with new African immigrants. He noted that the relations vary depending on the citizenship of the immigrants and their nationality. The relations generally are good for those who become Qatari citizens or for people like him who were born here. The educated black Qataris also tend to be more accommodating. The educational levels of black Qataris are on the rise, although they still lag behind those of the general population. While previously, few black Qataris attended universities, the younger generation is increasingly doing so. Because of the educational lag, relatively few have high positions in the government or private sectors. The army is slightly different, where the third in command is a black Qatari. Black women are also well represented in the police force. Sports tend to be dominated by black Qataris as well.

He insisted that race is not a big issue here, despite what he had just said. He acknowledged that the Bedouins are more likely to complain about black Qataris rising above them than the urban Qataris are. Marriage between Qatari Africans or African Qataris—he used these terms occasionally—and other Qataris is not common. Inter-marriage is generally discouraged by communities on both sides. It is important to point out that Qatari society cannot simply be divided between so-called black and white Qataris, for there are many other Qatari communities. It is more useful to talk in terms of nationalities of origin. There is a large number of Iranian Qataris who dominate the economy, Lebanese Qataris, Egyptian Qataris, and so on.

He argued that the Egyptians who came to Qatar earlier and in greater numbers than the Sudanese, and used to occupy high positions, have seen their relative position decline noticeably. He gave three interrelated reasons. First, Egypt's hegemonic position in the Arab world under Nasser has eroded. Egypt is no longer looked up to as the great Arab country, as the Gulf States have become richer and left Egypt behind as a poorer cousin. Second, Qatar and the other Gulf states have become more interested in forging independent ties with the large western countries and the major powers of Asia. Third, the policy of Qatarization embarked upon aggressively by the current emir has hurt Egyptians most since they dominate the public sector and professions targeted for Qatarization. Many Egyptians were forced to return home. Their government has not been supportive, and relations between Egypt and Qatar have cooled due to Middle East politics. In fact, the quota for Egyptian immigrants has been reduced. So Egyptians seem to be facing much greater problems in Qatar than the Sudanese. There are relatively few Tunisians, Algerians, and Moroccans.

Abdallah cautioned Mohamed not to talk too loudly, as the Egyptian librarian sitting at the front desk not too far away from the room where we were sitting might overhear him. But it's the truth, Mohamed protested.

We were joined by an Ethiopian student who has lived in Qatar since his secondary school days. When he came, there were few Ethiopians in the country. He claimed, rather

exaggeratedly, I thought, that there were no more than 100 families. Now large numbers come every day. Ironically, Ethiopians have benefitted from quotas imposed on other countries. He said, and the others nodded, that the government became alarmed with the large numbers of people from India, Philippines and the neighboring Arab countries so it sought to curtail their quotas and increase quotas from underrepresented countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea and even west African countries such as Mali. Consequently, some Somalis who are barred came here through Sudan with Sudanese passports. The Ethiopians tend to stay here five to ten years and then return home, unlike the Sudanese who stay longer or settle. The Ethiopians do this for three main reasons. First, they don't have enough money to bring their families, so they are under pressure to return. Second, they are more likely to use Qatar and other Gulf states as a transit point to Europe and North America. Finally, there is the religious factor. For Christian Ethiopians, the fact that Qatar is a conservative Muslim country makes it less attractive. I suggested that if that was true, then one could expect to find different patterns for Muslim Ethiopians, which the student agreed could indeed be the case. Unfortunately, he left before I could write down his name.

Then Abdallah called his Egyptian colleague Miftah Ahmed Hussien. He did part of his education in the United States where he completed high school and went to college in the early 1990s. He lived in Los Angeles and New York. He liked living in the U.S. because the country is tolerant, like Egypt. People generally don't interfere with your life and respect other people's culture and religion. He found it the same here. People in the Gulf are used to dealing with people from all over the world. He had expected to find Qataris arrogant and harboring a superiority complex because of their newfound wealth, but instead, most of them are good, polite, and respectful.

Egyptians make up one of the biggest African and Arab populations in Qatar. Clearly a proud Egyptian, Hussien claimed the administrative system here and many aspects of Qatari society are based on the Egyptian system. Egypt has been an asset to many Arab countries, helping them in the fields of education, government, engineering, and so on. He has lived here for three years. He used to go home up to four times a year, sometimes on weekends. Now that he just got married, there is no need to visit so often, he said with a big smile exposing his metal braces. He noted that because of its relatively large size, the Egyptian community had far less need for solidarity compared to the smaller communities, so they deal with everybody. But they feel closest to the Sudanese. He deals with the Sudanese as he does with Egyptians. They feel like one people — Egypt and Sudan is practically one country, he claimed expansively. I didn't catch Abdallah's reaction. Here we play soccer together, he added, as if to prove the point. There were people from many other African countries including the west African nations of Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo. But most of them are students and are not as close to the Egyptians as the Sudanese.

At the end, I asked all of them what term was used for peoples of African descent in Qatar. They were not sure. The term for black was *khel*, but it was not used. Perhaps one could call them Afro-Arab, I asked. They shook their heads in confusion. I didn't pursue the matter. It seemed to reinforce the point that national identities seem to have greater salience here than continental or racial identities.

Just before I thought we were done, an Eritrean student joined us and seemed keen to be interviewed. I indulged him briefly. He had actually grown up in Sudan and here; he mixes more with the Sudanese than the Eritrean community. He finds the Eritrean community relatively closed. While he deals with his Eritrean relatives here, he does not

attend public events organized by Eritreans. A fascinating wrinkle on the notion of national identity as a basis of a diasporic identity in Qatar, I thought.

After the students left, Abdallah went to the shelves and brought me several books, which he thought might be of interest. They were mostly general introductory or encyclopedic surveys of Qatari history and society that I didn't find terribly useful. Online searches of the library's book collection and electronic journals did not seem to yield anything particularly useful either, a clear indication of the paucity of scholarship on the subject of African diasporas in Qatar, however configured.

The library closes at 2:30 p.m. and opens at 7:00 a.m. Abdallah allowed me to use his cell to call the hotel for a car to come and pick me up. The same driver, Rodney, came. We agreed I would return tomorrow.

After a two-hour rest, I took the free hotel shuttle bus service to the *Souq*, a large traditional trading bazaar with dozens of shops selling everything from clothing to jewelry, handicrafts to antiques, watches to sunglasses, as well as wood carvings and interior decorations. It is spotlessly clean and the stalls are either full of customers or just the owners sitting on stools by the entrance, chatting with each other waiting for customers. But nobody loudly beckons you in except with a wave of the hand or a nod of the head. Or maybe it was just me. After walking through the maze I got to the road lined with coffee shops, small picturesque hotels, and restaurants, where one could easily spot the tourists and what looked like groups of students, some who were black. There were also a lot of local black men and women; at least I assumed they were local from their Islamic dress. I stopped by a seafood restaurant and ordered a mixed dish served with rice and vegetables. Not only was the food good, but it cost 52 riyals.

Upon returning to the place where the bus had dropped us off, I found the German woman who had come on the bus earlier. Three of us had left from the hotel. The third person, a Saudi who had come to Doha for a United Nations conference on cultural statistics, had departed the bus at the city. The Saudi is the Director of the International Cultural Organizations and Conferences and he had given me his card upon hearing that I would be visiting Riyadh. We agreed that I would contact him when I got there. He assured me that I would find Saudis friendly and welcoming. He asked how life is now in the U.S. under President Obama. He is a huge improvement over Bush, I said. At least he looks like us, he said pointing to his skin. In the U.S., he would pass for a very light-skinned African American. The German woman worked for Lufthansa and was here for 24 hours. She certainly knew how to keep herself busy. She had already been to the Museum of Islamic Art, which she enjoyed. The museum is a few minutes' walk from the Souq.

It has been a fine day indeed!

June 29, 2009

This was another productive day. I went back to Qatar University with the same driver, Rodney, but he appeared rather moody today so I didn't pay him any mind. I had told Abdallah that today I wanted to talk to women and more Afro-Qataris. He seemed excited to see me and wasted no time in taking me to the Women's Library to meet Yosra Gaafar Mudani. Walking through the open courtyards from the Men's Library to the Women's

Library was like being placed in an oven. I have never felt such heat before as I am experiencing here and as I did in New Delhi. What did people do before air conditioning? And, of course, not everybody has air conditioning even now.

Yosra has been in Qatar for ten years. A tall and heavy woman, she is incredibly funny and kept saying if I knew Arabic she could explain things a lot better. She is Sudanese and has a family of four—a daughter and three sons. Instead of talking in her office, she took us to an office of a male Sudanese colleague who has been in Qatar for twenty years. She wore an abaya and a pink headdress which she periodically tried to fix when it became loose.

She began by saying that, as an Arab, it is not difficult to integrate into Qatari society for they speak the same language and share the same religion. But there are challenges, for despite being fellow Arabs, Qataris have a different mentality. They tend to be uneasy if Arabs have better qualifications than they do. In fact, they try to ignore your experiences and certificates. She gave her own example and that of a Palestinian-Canadian. For the first four years that she worked here, her qualifications as a librarian were ignored and she worked as a secretary, which was a waste for her. Only during the last six years has she been working as a cataloguing librarian. The head of cataloguing, the Palestinian-Canadian, is leaving after only a year because of frustration for constantly being questioned, undermined, and not respected by his Qatari colleagues. Few foreigners stay for long, she claimed, for the same reasons. As she warmed up to the subject, she said Qataris don't respect foreigners. When you are with them they may laugh with you, but when they are not, they laugh at you. They particularly resent foreigners who make more money than they do. Every foreigner is treated badly, she concluded, whether you are a domestic or a professional.

She noted, however, that Qataris do distinguish among foreigners, including Arabs. Among Arabs, the pecking order is Lebanese on top, followed by Syrians, then Palestinians, Egyptians, and finally Sudanese, among whom distinctions are made between what she called *white*, *brown*, and *black* Sudanese, with black at the bottom. Thus, the highest status is reserved for white Muslims. She pointed to herself as a brown Sudanese, Abdallah as a black Sudanese, and the man who had been here twenty years as a white Sudanese. This was followed by much laughter and vigorous discussion among the three of them, which lapsed into Arabic.

Mudani repeated what I had heard repeatedly, that Qataris have a low opinion of Sudan and Africa as a whole. They think we are not civilized, she said with a rueful smile. This is based on ignorance of course, and bad images they see on television. All they hear about the Sudan is war and poverty. When you try to tell them the truth, they don't believe you. Only the educated ones seem to hear you, but the ordinary people don't. In fact, they are even surprised when you are good at your job and you speak good English. Among the Africans themselves, they generally get along quite well.

She attributed the haughty attitude of the Qataris to their recent rapid development. When she first came to Qatar ten years ago there was nothing here, she said dismissively. Most of the buildings you see in the city are new; everything is new here. The Qataris are simultaneously surprised by the incredible development their country has undergone and convinced they are special, that they are not like other Arabs.

As far as black and white Qataris, their relationships are complicated. This is a very sensitive subject here. It is a red and dangerous area, she said in a loud whisper. There is a red line you better not cross when it comes to this subject, she warned me. There were

spirited discussions among the three of them. Yosra was of the opinion that black Qataris identify with Africans. They come and talk to Africans and seek to work with them. She pointed to one of her colleagues in the library who is a black Qatari, with whom she is on good terms and seeks her advice frequently. But because this is a more closed society than those in Africa, she conceded that it is not as easy to establish close or intimate relations with them.

Abdallah was even less sanguine. He stated that he has not been able to make a single black Qatari friend, while he has many white Qatari friends. In fact, his best friend is a white Qatari. To illustrate how much black Qataris don't like Africans, he gave the example of one who had hit his car and run away. Abdallah got his license plate and reported the matter to the police, but the Qatari man denied ever having hit his car. The police asked him then how did Abdallah get his number. Abdallah believed it would have been easier if he had been hit by a white driver. I wasn't too convinced. Perhaps noticing the doubt on my face, he added that even among Sudanese who have been here for 40–50 years, he hasn't heard any of them claiming to have a black Qatari friend. The other Sudanese man said it could be because the society here treats them so badly they don't want to identify with Africans who tend to be despised. Moreover, Africans may remind them of their foreparents who led such harsh lives.

Whatever the challenges, Mudani resumed, the money was good here and she felt safe. This is a very safe society. Her parents like to come and visit, sometimes staying as long as six months. The culture is quite different in terms of music, dance, food, and relations between men and women, who tend to be separated in the public sphere. Foreign women are distinguished from local women, which allow the former more freedoms even if they are Muslim. She doesn't feel that she is really treated any differently compared to Sudanese men. For Qataris, the fact that she is a foreigner is probably more important than that she is a woman. She is looking forward to returning to the Sudan and bringing back the experiences and skills she has acquired here to help develop her country.

Before she left, she insisted that we drink a cappuccino. She is famous for making great cappuccino, she said laughingly. It was indeed steamy and wonderful. She asked whether I was Muslim and if I had been to the Sudan. When I replied in the negative, she said, with mock offense, "and you don't know Arabic either. You come to the Sudan and my father will teach you both Islam and Arabic," she burst out laughing. She is a very attractive woman and laughter seems to add to her beauty.

Abdallah and I dreaded going back into the hot oven outside. Fortunately, we only had to dash to the next building. This lovely campus is one of the few places where I have seen plants. We found Mohamed waiting for us. He was sitting with an English lecturer, who, as I soon found out, graduated a couple of years ago from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a master's in the teaching of English as a Second Language. He talked with that insufferable expatriate's condescension about the low standards among students, their poor preparation and study habits, and an inability to understand the reasons behind these poor work habits. They are brought up on memorization and had great difficulty in thinking critically and creatively, he said. What makes it worse is that he put on a gloss of liberal empathy. It's amazing how these so-called expatriates come to these countries thinking, and being treated by the locals as if they are so much better, when they are people who can't cut it in their own societies. There is no way this chap could get a job in the U.S.'s highly competitive academic job market, especially in the

current economic conditions. So he is doomed to playing the half-baked expatriate, resentful of himself and condescending to the locals.

I had expected Mohamed to bring some Afro-Qatari students. He excused himself but only returned with an Egyptian student, Karim Ashour. He came here when he was a year old because his father had a job offer, so he has been here for twenty years. He still thinks of himself as an Egyptian and he is proud of it. He goes to Egypt with his family for three months every summer. He has lots of relatives and friends in Egypt, so when he goes back they regard him as one of them who happens to live abroad, although those who really don't know him are not as forthcoming or friendly. He repeated the idea of hierarchy among foreigners in the way they are treated in Qatar. This reflects both popular attitudes and government policies. Generally, Egyptians get along well with Qataris. There are of course those who don't cooperate with Egyptians. Recently, relations between Egyptians and Qatari governments have been soured over policies towards Gaza, but this has not spilled over to relations among ordinary people. Since he grew up here, he has many friends among Qataris, they do many things together. He finds that relations among Egyptians depend on where in Egypt one comes from and when, as well as, sometimes, professions and class position. As far as he can tell, Egyptians don't seem to have many dealings with people from other North African or other African countries, but when they do, the relations are fine. People from each country seem to keep to themselves. Egypt has two identities, he said, both as an African and Arab country, but the Arab identity is stronger here.

Since he goes back and forth between Qatar and Egypt, he thinks there are more differences than similarities between the two countries. The religion and language are the same, although there are some differences between Egyptian Arabic and the Arabic spoken here. The society in Qatar is not as open as in Egypt; it is far more traditional and conservative. The food and music are completely different. Some Qataris like Egyptian music but hardly any Egyptians like Qatari music. Even the weather is different—it's much hotter here. Egypt is of course a much larger country, so even the topography is more diverse there than here. Besides the malls, there is little to do here. Egypt has a much older and richer culture; the whole of Qatar could fit into a suburb of Cairo. Inter marriages between Qataris and Egyptians happen occasionally, but generally, people prefer to marry fellow Egyptians. He would like to return and live in Egypt, but that is unlikely because his immediate family is here. Moreover, life seems to be a lot harder in Egypt than here in terms of amenities. In material terms, life is definitely better and easier here.

I was intrigued by his observation that among the Egyptian diaspora, those from the U.S. tend to be more critical of Egypt than those from the Gulf. I mentioned Marwa. He suggested that I talk to Injy Elnimr to get a different female Egyptian perspective that would substantiate the point he was making. I was reminded of a point made by Dr. Sharma in New Delhi, that the attitudes and engagements of the Indian diaspora with India varied according to their regional locations.

Injy was fascinating. A short, articulate woman who wore a headscarf and a bright Islamic dress, she offered what I thought was an insightful and informative comparative analysis of her stay in Japan and Qatar. She said she was much better able to relate both to other Egyptians and the local society in Japan than here in Qatar despite the fact that Japan is physically and culturally farther away from Egypt than Qatar. Japan is a relatively closed society but more accepting of the Other. This is in part because the Japanese are confident in their identity, in who they are. Qatar, like other Arab societies, is a society

in transition, in fact much more so than Egypt with its longer history and modernity. Therefore, the boundaries of what's permissible and what is not, of the do's and don'ts, are not clear here. Japan gave her the space to be what she was, to reflect on her Egyptianness. It's been far more difficult here. Even take the veil, for instance. In Japan, as in Egypt, she could wear a veil and jeans without being questioned. But here she is constantly questioned if she does so. External apparel has acquired a much greater weight in defining one's Arab and Muslim identity rather than a clearly defined code of ethics and morals.

Before she came to Qatar, she used to believe strongly in Arab unity, in Nasser's Pan-Arabism, but now she doesn't. Arab unity is a myth. She has not embraced Sadat, she said with a cynical laugh. The economy, not culture; economic relations, not cultural traditions, should be the basis of unity among countries. Compared to Egypt, this is a much more conservative society, intolerant of difference and the other.

In Japan, she found it easier to relate to other Egyptians because they were more self-selective than here. She seemed to imply they were more professional and behaved like expatriates given the distances, unlike here where the social composition of the Egyptian community is more diverse. Similar phenomenon can be observed with the Indian diaspora in the U.S, compared to the Indian diaspora in the Gulf, or for that matter the Indian Diaspora in the U.S. and the Mexican Diaspora in the U.S. Inja says she finds it easier to deal with or relate to Tunisians. There is a generational and ideological dynamic. Also, Egyptians who have been here for more than fifteen years differ from those who have come more recently. She has been here for three years. She cannot relate to 90% of the older residents because they harbor such negative views of Egypt. This is partly based on what they see on the news to keep justifying why they are here. Many of them also realize that they cannot go back and compete with the people they left behind. Qualifications that are quite ordinary in Egypt are in high demand here. But because of Qatarization, or simply because of local jealousies and training deficiencies, many are unable to improve their skills to higher levels so the professional gap between them and their colleagues they left behind in Egypt keeps widening. She mentioned a former schoolmate who went to the U.S. They were all excited for him, even envious. But once he got there, he took so long to finish his studies because he had to work and he didn't go far in his studies and was left behind by his classmates who had remained in Egypt.

So a lot of the Egyptians who have stayed here a long time are often frustrated and angry at their own situation. They know Arab-imported labor is treated very badly here because their countries are supposed to be in bad shape. The inability to protest and the internalization of the narrative that their countries are in bad shape reinforces a sense of insecurity, which only makes their situation worse because they can't even threaten to leave. Thus, unlike people back home, Egyptians here don't even have a space to empower themselves by fighting back. She didn't feel or see that sense of insecurity among Egyptians in Japan. She finds it easier to relate to younger Egyptians who don't have the pessimistic views of their country which are held by their elders or parents. She concluded by emphasizing what she thought the problem was in Qatar and the Arab world more generally. Conservative and liberal forces are locked in combat so that the boundaries of the do's and don'ts are less clear in this transitional period. This state of confusion is debilitating. Part of the Arab problem, she looked at me with subdued anger, is that Arabs don't reason. We don't know how to think strategically, as the Israelis do. If you get a group of Arabs together, she said sarcastically, within five minutes they will start quarreling over petty matters. Here you see tiny little countries like Qatar thinking they are better

because they have some money. She has had it. She is returning to Egypt soon. And with a happy smile, she announced, she is getting married. I congratulated her and she gave me her contacts and asked me to get in touch if I ever visited Alexandria.

I went back to the main floor of the students activities building where Mohamed was playing a game. As we walked back to Abdallah's office, he lamented that he had been unable to get Afro-Qataris for me to talk to but he would keep trying. Abdallah made the same promise as he drove me back to the hotel.

Later I met with Rogaia. We had agreed to a formal interview. She came promptly at 6:00, as agreed. We sat in the lobby and ordered some tea for her and coffee for me. Then I outlined my questions and areas of discussion on which I was keen to hear her analyses and informed opinion. First, the patterns of Sudanese migrations in the global North compared to those in the Gulf; second, comparisons between the two regions in the patterns of Sudanese engagements with other African migrants and diasporas; third, their comparative patterns of engagement with Sudan; fourth, the nature of scholarly discourses on African diasporas in the two regions; fifth, a comparison of the social and cultural dynamics that frame diaspora identities in the two regions; and finally, any pertinent comparisons derived from her odyssey in the two regions that may have a bearing on diaspora dynamics and studies in the two regions.

Our conversation didn't necessarily follow this outline. She seemed preoccupied with Darfur, a subject she would often return to. She began outlining her book on Sudanese migrants and elites in North America before the powerful ghosts of Darfur took over. In much of the existing literature, there was an assumption that Sudanese migrations were recent, driven on the one hand by political and economic pressures engendered by civil wars, and on the other by the movement of students. From talking to her father, she learned that there were Sudanese seamen from the Second World War who settled in Brooklyn, New York. Among them was a man called Abu Bakr, who changed his name to Baker, who went back and forth between the Sudan and the U.S. In fact, Sudanese migrations even started earlier. Her father told her of a remarkable Sudanese man who arrived in New Orleans in 1904 and became an influential figure. He converted 40,000 African Americans to Islam. The book starts with him, a charismatic figure who connected Sudan, Egypt, Britain and the U.S. in his sojourns demonstrating that Sudanese transnationalization is nothing new.

The political migrations picked up during Gaafar Nimeiry's regime. Nationalization led to the dispersal of Sudanese of Amernian, Jewish, Greek, and other descents deemed alien or non-indigenous. This was accompanied by economically driven migrations to the Gulf. Migrations accelerated following the introduction of Sharia in the 1980s, which antagonized Sudanese Christians and moderate Muslims. People from the South fleeing Sharia tended to go Uganda and Kenya, while those from the North went to the Gulf.

A twist came following the Gulf War. President Bashir had supported Saddam Hussein and following the end of the war, the Sudanese were evicted overnight. It was traumatic for them, some returned to Sudan while others went to Europe and North America. In the meantime, more Sudanese students began applying for asylum in the U.S., Canada, and other countries. At the same time, some refugees from camps like Kakuma in Kenya were resettled in the U.S. and Canada. Among them were the so-called Lost Boys.

Rogaia argued that up to 2002 the Sudanese migrants and diaspora were largely united. They saw themselves as Sudanese, an identity that had yet to be ruined by the issues of Arabism and Islamism. Even where there was contestations, as, for example, between

seamen who settled earlier and the new migrants and refugees about whom the former were suspicious, this had more to do with discourses of respectability, class, and citizenship than religious or racial Sudanese identities. In a sense, the Sudanese diaspora in the global North existed as a nation in absentia. At that time, being opposed to the government did not entail being opposed to society. People built alliances and communities of empathy based on shared experiences rather than ethnic identities. Social relationships were negotiated with fluidity based on a sense of shared nationhood.

The outbreak of the Darfur crisis in 2003 fundamentally changed the terms of discourse. It brought about the ethnicization and racialization of Sudanese identities that spilled over into the diaspora. It challenged and changed the ways Sudanese identities had been constructed before in the diaspora. She found herself as a northern Sudanese being challenged by white American scholars at conferences on how she could discuss Darfur so sensitively. They of course never ask themselves such a question as Americans discussing Darfur. She went into a long critique against the SDC, its indefensible racialization and feminization of the genocide, the anthropologized nature of the scholarship that has been produced on it, and the unseemly alliances between NGOs, Christian fundamentalists and Jewish Zionists. Darfur cracked previous political identities by pitting Africans, Arabs, and the victimized Darfurians against the Southerners. There never was a "Save the South Coalition." The fact that Darfurians were Muslims and in fact, had been among the most ardent perpetrators of Islamization in the South, and are fragmented into so many competing groups and militia, puts a lie to the notion of the Darfur crisis as one between Arabs and Africans and of the Darfurians as a homogeneous victimized community. She gave the history of the factors behind the crisis, which moved us farther away from the topic at hand.

One interesting point I was able to pick up on in her long discourse concerned the organization of the Darfur movements in the U.S. and Qatar, which underscores the different social formations and contexts of the Sudanese diaspora in the two countries. Rogaia used the example of a mutual colleague at an American university and his two cousins with the same last name in the Gulf. Ali supports SDC, while his cousins support the Great Darfur Sons League. The latter avoids the racialized distinctions that drive the SDC. In fact, Rogaia is a member of the group and she has been working with them on a research project. While SDC discourse seeks to rescue the gendered, raced, and classed body of the Darfurian—an ethnic category that did not exist before—the League sees this crisis as a manifestation of the Sudanese state crisis that confronts them as Sudanese. Key to this difference is the fact that in Qatar, the Sudanese of different backgrounds interact with Arabs all the time, and this challenges the narrative of Arab insensitivity. The role of the Qatar Red Crescent Society and its humanitarian relief efforts in building schools, hospitals and other facilities in the Sudan—far more than what the SDC actually does on the ground—and Qatar's role in trying to reconstitute, rather than fragment, the integrity of the Sudanese state and society by bringing the Sudanese government and the various rebel groups (some of whose meetings she has attended) together for discussion and negotiation reinforce the de-racialization of the Darfur crisis. This underscores the role of host societies in the construction of diaspora identities and framing the terms and modes of engagement between the diaspora and the homeland.

Rogaia couldn't resist comparing Qatar to Egypt. Not only is Qatar not motivated by the U.S.'s imperial ambitions, it also lacks Egypt's age-old hegemonic ambitions over the Sudan. Egypt has always been very patronizing to the Sudan and in the current Darfur crisis, Qatar has played a more productive role than Egypt, as an important force

for reconciliation, not confrontation. This seemed to explain her fondness for Qatar. Of all the people I have talked to, she has been the least critical of Qatar. Perhaps this is why.

She briefly compared, unfavorably, her students at Tufts and Brown in the U.S. and her students in Britain, to how wonderful her students are in Qatar. Then she turned to the Sudan arguing that in Sudan the discourse about Darfur takes into account geopolitical, environmental, and border politics that cannot be collapsed into a narrative of ethnic cleansing. She revealed that she recently edited a journal sponsored by a Sudanese university. This gave her an opportunity to see young Sudanese reflect on their identities as complex, contextual and experiential layers of self, much like her own identity as a Sudanese, Afro-Arab, Arab, woman, secularist, and Muslim. I noted she didn't mention diaspora.

It occurred to me she could lead a fantastic eSymposium on Darfur on my website and I made the proposal. She seemed interested. Despite my misgivings about the way Darfur had hijacked the discussion, I remained deeply impressed by her intellect and passions and, of course, her generosity. I thanked her profusely. It was clear she had enjoyed the intellectual company.

By the time I got back to my room I was too exhausted to pack. In any case, there was no rush. My flight tomorrow is in the afternoon.

June 30, 2009

It's so much more pleasant to travel in the afternoon and avoid getting up so early. I had a leisurely breakfast where I briefly talked to the Kenyan woman who serves there. She has been here for a year but she said she much prefers Dubai where she lived for three years and which she says is so much bigger and more vibrant.

Later in the morning I got a call from Abdallah who had managed to arrange for a prominent Afro-Qatari to talk with me. I told him that since I had about an hour before I had to leave for the airport, it might be a little hard to do now. I wish I had known sooner. He apologized for not being able to take me to the airport, but gave me the number of the person who he said I could call later if I so wished. I thought that was quite touching.

I had a little shock when I went to checkout. The breakfasts, which I thought were included in the room charge, were not. Together with the room tax, it made this the most costly hotel of all the hotels I have stayed at, and I wasn't amused, and therefore in no mood to compliment them when they asked what I thought of my stay. The only slight consolation is that the driver who took me to the airport was quite nice and I gave him a tip. I thought, it's rather half-hearted to offer free shuttle service to the airport only twice a day at 7:00 a.m. and noon. Other times they charged more than twice an ordinary taxi rate. And they claim ordinary taxis are hard to get!

If the hotel was full of Filipinos, the airport reaffirmed the dominance of migrant workers from the Indian subcontinent. Indians and Pakistanis apparently make up about 36% of Qatar's population, and it showed, they were everywhere at the airport. Mostly men, they were loaded with bulging suitcases and other baggage and compared to the glum faces on my way from Dubai, they were chatty and cheerful. Their excitement was oddly infectious. Interestingly, the ticket counters for Qatar Airways had a lot more black people at the service counters. Many were wearing Islamic dress.

My original impressions of the airport were confirmed. This is a small and old airport. We took shuttle buses to the aircraft. I seemed to recognize one of the air stewards, a Chinese-looking woman. It was a full flight, mostly packed with Indians and Pakistanis and a sprinkling of whites. I didn't see any Africans, unless some of the Arabs were from Africa. Despite the shortness of the flight, we were given a snack and drinks. I returned to reading the magazines I had started at the airport.

Dubai

June 30, 2009

Dubai proclaims its status as a global city, as a Mecca of consumption, right from the airport. The baggage claim is a large, luminous hall with waterfalls on one side and dozens of carousels. The customs official stamped my passport without asking any questions and without interrupting his conversation with his colleague sitting in the next box. As you leave the baggage claim there is a large banner hoisted above with a multi-racial cast of faces and a caption that proclaims "Diversity is the only thing" or "One of the things we have in common."

Immediately outside the baggage claim I saw the offices of the major hotels, including the Park Hyatt. They all had lounge chairs for customers to sit in and await their shuttles to their respective hotels. The man in the Park Hyatt lounge welcomed me with a practiced friendliness. He asked me gently if I had flown Business Class, I said Economy. How much is it to the hotel? He said 220 dirham. I almost fell off the chair. I asked how much it cost to take a taxi. About 30 dirham, he said. It was an easy decision. He showed me where to go. As I was walking there, I ran into a black man wearing a jacket with a company logo. He greeted me and we quickly introduced each other by way of our countries of origin. He is from Ghana and he pointed to the taxi stand that was a few feet away. The taxi cost just a little less than 30 dirham, for the hotel is quite close to the airport, no more than three kilometers or so.

It was immediately evident that Dubai is indeed much larger and a busier city than Doha. The traffic was heavy on the multiple-lane highways leading to the hotel. Above all, there were plants—trees, hedges, grass, and flowers! That soothed the arid landscape. And from the entrance to the hotel reception, perhaps half a kilometer away, it was all green, the immaculate grounds of the hotel and villas and golf course. I could have been in any lush, tropical resort.

The hotel seeks to evoke a luxurious Moorish palace from the reception to the courtyards. I was greeted by name as I got out of the taxi, to my slight astonishment. The reception staff was a multinational crew of Asians. I was led to my room by a man from Kerala in India and he was pleased to hear I was recently in his country and was keen to hear how I liked it. We walked past the stylish coffee bar and lounge area, then a restaurant, and up to my room facing the sea. Like the other Park Hyatts where I have stayed in Johannesburg and Chicago, the room has an understated elegance, its beauty enhanced by fine paintings and sculpture. I tried to sit on the deck to enjoy the view, the towering buildings across and the yachts docked below, but the punishing, humid heat chased me inside.

The main restaurant where I went to have dinner was equally chic, but it was largely empty. It was a buffet of Arab cuisine, which, with all due respect, is no Indian cuisine. So I ordered à la carte. The food was okay. Clearly my palate had been spoiled by India.

The Internet is only free for two hours and I made good use of that by catching up on the online news from my usual sites. And I briefly talked to Moza, who broke the news

that his boss, the governor of the Reserve Bank, had just been fired. He sounded worried about his own contract renewal. I just hope President Bingu wa Mutharika, with his new overwhelming mandate will not become an authoritarian leader like Dr. Banda who he seems to admire so much and tries to emulate. The signs don't look good.

July 1, 2009

My first day in Dubai could not have started better. I had an appointment with Aisha Bilkhair Khalifa, perhaps the leading historian of the African Diaspora in the Emirates. After breakfast, I took the hotel taxi to the Dubai Women's College. The driver was an older Indian man with whom I clicked the moment he learned I had been to India. On the way we had to ask for directions to the college a few times and even called Aisha.

The driver dropped me off by the main administration building where we had been told at the gate that Dr. Khalifa's office was located. Like everything I have seen here, the campus looks new and well maintained. At the reception I asked for Aisha's office and they pointed me to a black woman standing a few feet away who was talking to another woman. She turned and gave me a bright smile and warm welcome. She finished her conversation and led me to her office. Welcome to Dubai, she repeated several times. She suggested that we go for lunch in the cafeteria. Since I had just eaten my breakfast I only ordered a fruit salad while she had a sandwich.

A tall, slim woman, she was wearing a pinstriped pantsuit and we seemed to have bonded immediately with our easy laughs. But behind her friendly demeanor I could tell she brooks no nonsense. And the more I listened to her the more it was clear she is indeed one tough sister.

She began by telling me how she got interested in the history of her people. The interest started early. One day she was given 5 dirham and she decided to buy a camera and started taking pictures of her family members. As she took pictures, she would ask about the history of the family. As she became older and went to school, she realized that everybody's history was covered except for that of her people. She felt very strongly that history should be a highway on which everybody has a right to drive. When she entered college she began researching her family history more systematically. Her father's foreparents came from Yemen, but they are not sure where her mother's people came from. It is most likely that they came from northern Ethiopia or northern Sudan.

As she began to investigate the history of the community, she relied on oral sources from older members of the community, British archival documents, and travelers' texts. It was clear from all these sources that the Africans came here as slaves and servants. She sought to uncover the stories of the Africans, which tended to be ignored in the official narratives of the sheikhs, the ruling families, even if Africans were often members of these households and foreign travelers visiting the sheikhs remarked on their presence. The British records are even more explicit insofar as they include accounts from Africans who sought freedom from slavery.

There is widespread denial among people of African descent in the Emirates of their Africanness, and in the wider society that slavery existed. The Afro-Emirati claim no African blood, insisting that they are Arabs. This is not a simple case of racial denial; rather it reflects the dynamics of assimilation and identity in the region. Race doesn't

have the same salience as in the Americas, she stressed. Identity is tied much more to language, religion, and social status and associations. Not surprisingly, when she started her research people, even from the community, assumed she had a complex to sort out. Yet the importance of color cannot be entirely dismissed in this society. Many black Emiratis seek to marry lighter Emiratis to improve the race, which underscores the existence of self-denial. Behind every black Emirati there is a complex story, a fascinating history. She came across the case of a person who was kidnapped in Ethiopia who was exchanged from one place to another for the next eighteen years before landing in Dubai. She is trying to trace the subsequent history of that person's family.

The complete denial that enslavement existed is often based on the notion that Islam doesn't condone slavery. Africans who were Islamized could not have been treated as slaves. But this doesn't rule out the enslavement of the Africans before their Islamization and Arabization. In fact Islamization was essential for the enslaved Africans to be allowed to perform domestic duties such as the preparation of food. Non-Muslims and uncircumcised people were regarded as unclean. Those who deny the existence of slavery do so even despite the fact that archival documents refer to its existence. Those who grudgingly accept that slavery existed tend to make the self-serving argument that it helped to civilize the Africans, an argument that is often made by defenders of slavery in the Americas, she noted.

Under such circumstances, people like Aisha who argue about the existence of slavery are often questioned. It became clear that she needed academic credibility, so for her PhD she chose two supervisors with impeccable credentials. One published a book that was endorsed by the President himself; the other is a renowned Emirati scholar who has taught in Europe. This made it easier; gave her the space to talk about this most difficult and sensitive of topics. Strategically, she decided to talk about the Afro-Gulf, not simply the Afro-Emirati, which would have provoked resistance.

At a crucial national conference held on May 28, 2007 where she was invited to talk about the African cultural contributions to the Emirates, including music, she decided to break the taboo. Before talking about the assigned topic, she told the audience, let's talk about how the Africans came here through the slave trade. Everyone was stunned. Afterward the press approached her and said they didn't know how they could feature that in their reports. Report what I said, she advised them. Some accused her of trying to create division when the Emirates were trying to create one identity among its peoples, regardless of their historical places of origin. From that time she started writing more openly about the Afro-Emiratis. This flew in the face of a 2008 presidential decree on creating one identity. What she finds remarkable is that the markers of this identity are not only externalized and embodied in the approved forms of national dress and dance, but the cultural elements valorized as national are Bedouin, not African. And so Emirati identity is now associated with sailing, diving, and horse riding, and people of other cultural background are forced to conform to this idealized national narrative.

Dr. Khalifa is gravely concerned that not many scholars are brave or interested enough in working on Afro-Emirati history and culture. She is particularly concerned that as the older generation dies out, their knowledge is being lost. This knowledge has not been adequately passed on to the young who are more preoccupied with the superficial elements of Gulf modernization. This is evident in the changes that have taken place in wedding ceremonies. In the pre-oil days, besides religious rituals, African musical forms constituted an integral part of wedding celebrations. The secularization and modernization of wedding ceremonies since the growth of the oil economy in the 1970s has led to the gradual dis-

appearance of music of African origin, called *Al-Ma'aliyah*, not only from weddings that are increasingly held in hotels but from the national stage as it is not broadcast on UAE television and radio.

In her research, Aisha has gone back to 1833 when Dubai was first established as a separate entity from Abu Dhabi. She looked for any mention of slaves in the records of merchants; British meetings with sheikhs in which they were quite meticulous about events, dates, prevailing disputes, and the households of the people they met; and manumission records in which the names of slaves and their backgrounds were recorded. She calls this the historical community. Slaves brought their masters both income and prestige in society. The enslaved Africans, of course, enjoyed none of the wealth or influence. In a couple of instances, two Africans became tribal leaders but they didn't enjoy their power for too long. There is certainly no evidence that they were able to pass it on to their offspring. They would occasionally speak on behalf of the sheikhs but they did not exercise power in their own right. This is largely because they simply didn't have the numbers. The number of Africans brought to the Gulf was certainly nowhere comparable to the Americas. In 1833 the whole population of Dubai was no more than 1,500; and in 1920 it was about 20,000. The pearl industry was the main employer of Africans outside domestic service for the sheikhs. At the height of the industry, there were only 200 ships which could each carry a maximum of 50 people. The level of warfare was often limited to small-scale skirmishes so there was no need for large numbers of imported soldiers. Certainly nineteenth century UAE had far fewer Africans than ninth century Basra in Iraq where the famous Zanj Revolt occurred (869–883 AD).

Slave resistance was quite common. One of the forms it took was through cultural performances. During ritual performances in which people would get into a trance, the history and social hierarchies would be enacted and subverted. These performances and songs, which survived into the twentieth century, mentioned places like Mali, Nubia, and Ethiopia; the lowest social position for the slaves was reserved for the *Tuklur*. Aisha is intrigued by the spatial and social histories embedded in these songs and wonders when the social hierarchies they reflect were created. Is the marginalization of the *Tuklur* in fact the inverse of the reputed wealth of Mali that triggered, following Mansa Musa's legendary visit to Cairo and Mecca, Arab covetousness for African wealth?

I was intrigued by her suggestion that slave cultural resistance worked to minimize the brutalities of slavery because the peoples of the Gulf also believed in spirits, the *jinn*, notwithstanding their Islamic faith, and feared the spiritual powers of the slaves. I suggested that this cultural closeness and shared moral economy, rather than Islam as such, might be the key to understanding differences in Gulf and American slave systems. She said she hadn't thought of that but it made sense.

I asked her to provide a broad overview of Afro-Gulf histories. She began with Oman. She argued that Oman enjoys closer and more established relations with East Africa. As a result, Afro-Omani identities are more pronounced and the role of Afro-Omanis is more evident and realistic. African music and rhythms have survived and permeated through the culture. Even the manner of dress, the colorful nature of the clothes people wear, including Islamic dress, reflects the vibrancy of African cultural influences which are not hidden as they tend to be in the UAE. The old discourse tended to focus on the influence of Arabs in Zanzibar, but scholars like Aisha have been pushing for more systematic studies of African influences in Oman as well as the complexity of Afro-Arab relations exemplified by Oman's engagement with East Africa. The construction and circulation of Arab identities from this engagement are quite intriguing. The sense of Arabness

in Oman is different than in Dubai, which is rooted in Bedouin traditions, while in Oman merchants have historically played a crucial role.

In the Emirates, she repeated, African influences tend to be masked. Indeed, the topic is still largely taboo. The rapid modernization and development—all these high rises—serve to hide the country's terrible history as far as Africans are concerned. Saudi Arabia also denies this history. The system of marginalizing Africans, she claimed, is still alive and well. The royals still have black concubines and have children with them who don't enjoy as much power as their father's other offspring. She gave the example of Prince Bandar, the former Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. who was initially marginalized before he was finally accepted. She expressed astonishment at Malcolm X's revelation that he found racial harmony in Saudi Arabia when at that time black people were being treated as second-class citizens.

Bahrain has a different history. Not only have Saudi Arabia and Iran tried to annex it, but the minority Sunni rule over the Shia majority. The slaves came with the merchants who relocated there. For a while, Kuwait has been seen as a liberal oasis, a kind of Lebanon, the Paris of the region. Claims of equality are, however, not borne out in reality. Aisha gave the example of the Crown Prince and Minister of Defense who died recently. His mother was black and all efforts were made to prevent him from acceding to the throne. On Iran, she didn't have much to say except to lash out at the condescending work and film documentary by Behnaz Mirzai. The documentary on Afro-Iranians, which was featured at the Zanzibar Film Festival that she attended, looked like it was straight out of the Discovery Channel. I later learned that Aisha has herself been a consultant for a documentary on the African diaspora in the Gulf that has not yet been released. At a private showing in New York, which was accompanied by a mini conference, Wole Soyinka commended Aisha for her work.

Given that she lived and studied in the U.S. on and off for the past twenty years, I asked her to compare the experiences of Afro-Emiratis and African Americans. She identified a lot of similarities. The two communities are highly matrifocal because of the differentiated roles of men and women under slavery. Here the male slaves went diving. They left the women to look after their families and the "big house," as it was called here. Black women were subjected to concubinage in both slave societies. Other similarities include the role of music and the survival of African rhythms, body language, including styles of walking, as well as the obsession with hair, especially among women.

Aisha went into an intriguing discussion about hair braiding styles. One of the most popular is called *shungi*, presumably a corruption of Songhay, the ancient West African empire, which is quite suggestive of some of the possible origins of the ancestors of Afro-Emiratis. As for dance, one of the most popular styles is called *naban* derived from Nubian. In this dance, men and women face each other, separated by drummers in between and as the music plays they move to and from each other quite suggestively. Some of the traditional songs talk about Suja, Sawarkan, Mecca, Medina, and Yemen, an inventory of the journeys of their ancestors, which is also quite suggestive of their historical journeys.

Another similarity between the Afro-Emirati and African-American communities can be seen in the popularity of verbal repartee as well as the temperamental tendency to get angry quickly and personalize disagreements. She was struck by the fondness of African Americans to sit on porches and talk and comment on neighborhood happenings. As for food, the Afro-Emiratis seem to have lost many of their cooking styles except for one dish that uses barley.

The main difference she noticed is in the perception of self. People in the U.S. are preoccupied with race. When they come here and don't find the same preoccupation, African Americans think we are in denial, she observed. The levels of assimilation here are such

that people do not think or talk about their skin color. She didn't think of herself primarily as a black woman until she went to study for her MA at San Francisco State University. Her brothers also became more conscious of their blackness in the U.S. because of the pervasive racial profiling against black men. She used to react with bemusement and astonishment when people would use the racial epithet, *nigger*. The higher levels of assimilation or integration here, however, change when it comes to marriage.

Relations between recent African immigrants, most of whom are expatriate workers and professionals, are practically nonexistent. Afro-Emerati have terrible stereotypes of Africans. Nigerians, for example, are generally reviled as crooks infamous for their money multiplying schemes and magic, so nobody wants to interact with them. The absence of interaction also reflects different residential patterns. Afro-Emiratis live in the suburbs while the new African communities tend to be in the city. Ethiopians might be a slight exception. Many Ethiopian women work as maids so they do interact with Afro-Emiratis and the wider society outside public spaces. They are the ones who are introducing or reintroducing elements of African cultural practices, from hair styling to foods. Injera, the traditional Ethiopian bread, is becoming well-known in households in which these women work, where they have a reputation for being more ethical and responsible with children than Indians and Filipinos. Emiratis would rarely ask Indian maids to cook them Indian food, she noted. She quickly added that there are a lot of Ethiopians who are professionals and in business.

Generally, all Emiratis, regardless of ethnicity, tend to be suspicious of foreigners. They think they come here to make money, indeed to rip the country off. There is limited cultural dialogue with foreigners whom they rarely invite home, preferring to meet them in restaurants. There is a kind of internal apartheid: the Emiratis are a minority, but they enjoy the privileges of citizenship, which the foreigners, who are the overwhelming majority, do not. The indigenous people feel a sense of entitlement and superiority. Foreigners are categorized according to where they come from and individuals are placed accordingly. Westerners are placed on top, led by Americans, then British, followed by other Europeans; then come the Indians followed by Pakistanis. Africans are at the bottom regardless of whether they come from North or sub-Saharan Africa. North African Arabs are generally not respected; they are thought of as crooks. Moroccan women, for example, are stereotyped as prostitutes.

For ranking of the indigenous populations, the Bedouins are represented by the ruler and his tribe are on top, followed by the merchant class who are descended from Persian and other Gulf states, the non-wealthy Arab tribesmen, the historical community of Africans, and below this are the foreigners who are ranked along the lines she indicated.

As we came to the end of our formal conversation, Aisha expressed the need for young people to get involved in research on Afro-Emirati history and culture. Such is her commitment that she is leaving her current job to join a research center where she can establish research programs, including those for young people. She would like to establish awards for them to produce narratives about their family histories as part of the process of creating a national archive. She doesn't underestimate the challenges. Everyone these days is interested in information technology and business not history and culture. We are in a coma now, she lamented, don't be fooled by all this glitter. National awareness has been reduced to the external symbols of dress rather than being based on historical awareness and cultural confidence that comes out of it. As we drove out of the campus, she discussed some of her current research on youth and culture and language. The youth sometimes challenge her patriotism because she doesn't wear Islamic dress. Yet at the same time they valorize western tastes, including fast food that they prefer over the much healthier local

diet. Here, fast food joints are not seen as junk food as in the U.S., but symbols of cosmopolitan cuisine and consumption. The confusion is to be expected for a society whose people only recently lived in tents or communal homes and are now suddenly living in mansions and expensive industrialized apartments, she noted. The tragedy is that there is little reflection on these transformations and their long-term implications. She is trying to investigate how these changes are reflected in language use patterns and social behaviors within families and communities.

The external and superficial markers of national identity are now such that even foreigners assume she is not from Dubai because she doesn't wear Islamic dress. She pointed to one of the servers in the cafeteria, a man from Goa, who one day asked her whether she goes home. She replied, yes she does quite often. Where is your home, he asked. Dubai, she replied. He persisted, no; I mean your real home. Dubai. He looked confused. How come you dress like that then, he asked. So her dress, not race, defined her in the eyes of this migrant worker. He sensed we were talking about him so she invited him to introduce me. She first said I was from Malawi before mentioning that I lived in Chicago. His expression changed in an instant after hearing I lived in Chicago. In the car we both laughed.

I asked her to drop me by a bookstore. The only places which had bookstores were the malls and she took me to a Dubai mall, which is not yet fully completed, but is reportedly the world's largest mall located next to the world's tallest building. I have never been there, she said; tell me what you think, she said, cheekily. It is hideously massive, befitting a shopping paradise in a desert that worships water, for on one side of the mall are long walls of cascading waterfalls. In several shops and restaurants where I stopped to ask for directions to the nearest bookstore, I came across several black assistants and waiters. Out of curiosity I asked where they were from. Kenya, they all said. In the end, I found the bookstore. My home library can put it to shame, not to mention the typical bookstore chains, Borders or Barnes & Noble. Clearly, Dubai is not trying to compete on the book and reading fronts. As I left to look for a taxi I got out on the wrong side facing a fountain with water spouts dancing to music. This is a Disney of consumption; it finally fully dawned on me. Disney in New York or Chicago, it appeared as the taxi drove through the maze of skyscrapers competing for the rarefied air of the desert skies.

July 2, 2009

Hamdy Hassan came to pick me up exactly at noon as we had agreed. We last met in Cairo in 2002 when he was head of African Studies at Cairo University. He has been here for the past seven years teaching at Zayed University, although he keeps his affiliation with Cairo University. In fact, he said as we drove out of the hotel grounds, whenever he is making public presentations he always mentions his appointment with Cairo University, which is a much more prestigious institution than his current employer. He is here for the money, he said regretfully.

He has grayed a little, but is as cheerful as ever. He remarked that I was still looking young, and what was the secret. You are looking good yourself, I responded. He shook his head and we laughed. It was so hot and humid that the moment I left the air-conditioned reception my glasses fogged up and I couldn't see. You couldn't have chosen a worse time to visit Dubai, he said. Not only is it unbearably hot, but everyone is away on summer break. We briefly discussed Ahmed Salem, a former student of his at Cairo University

and of mine at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who is now teaching with him at Zayed and who has gone to Cairo for the summer. I had hoped to see him. I was pleased to hear that he is doing well, working hard and liked by students. He was always a serious-minded person. He and his wife, who is now studying for her PhD and who I supported for her MA application before I left UIUC in 2003, now have two kids. When I left Illinois in 2003 they had one.

For the next six hours or so that we spent together, Hamdy took me to two places where we did more sitting and talking than sightseeing. Typically academic, our conversations ran the gamut from Dubai and the Emirates to African and American politics to family matters. Issues of the diaspora cropped up from time to time. First, we went to Festival City, one of Dubai's numerous massive malls. Four, five years ago there was nothing here, he said, it was all sand. We briefly walked around the mall and settled for lunch at one of the many restaurants in the mall that was full of customers. Several hours later he drove me to Uptown, a residential neighborhood in whose midst is a strip mall. In the winter it is very nice here, he said pointing to the outside cafes, for you could come and sit or shop and eat. The combination of apartments, shops, gyms, and restaurants made the place look like an attractive place to live. We went into one of his favorite digs, a kind of neighborhood bar-restaurant. We were served by a Kenyan woman. Dubai feels like a miniature UN. Everywhere one goes, there are people of all races and numerous nationalities. At the mall in Festival City, the shop assistants and customers include many Africans. It was the same in Uptown among the people walking around and going in and out of the surrounding buildings.

Dubai has been very smart, Hamdy noted, in turning itself into a shopping paradise, a commercial hub linking Asia, Africa, and Europe. Oil revenues now account for less than six percent of national income. Abu Dhabi and some of the other Emirates still depend largely on oil revenues. There is a lot of competition among the seven Emirates that make up the UAE, but the leadership of Dubai has been particularly foresighted. Much of the development has occurred since he has been here. In fact, it can be dated to 2004 when the current ruler came to power following his father's death. This coincided with the decline of the oil economy. Yet Dubai entered the period of its fastest growth. He contrasted Dubai's visionary leadership and rapid economic growth to Egypt's somnolent leadership and stagnation. Egyptians cannot believe that their once great country has been eclipsed by the likes of Dubai, and that within Dubai and the Emirates in general, Egyptians are not generally held in particularly high esteem in the pecking order among foreign nationals. He told the story of an Egyptian driver who worked for a prominent Emirati official. Each time he opened the door, the Emirati official told a friend of Hamdy's, he could see the pained scornful look on the driver's face, as if asking what the world was coming to that he, an Egyptian, was a servant for an Emirati, someone from a small desert country. The only criticism Hamdy voiced about Dubai and the Emirates was their relative social conservatism compared to Egypt's much more liberal and vibrant culture.

He gave a fascinating explanation on the dominance of South Asian labor in Dubai. Indians and Pakistanis are far more attractive than Arab workers because, as non-Arabs, many who don't speak Arabic and are not Muslims, they are easier to control and exploit. As for Egyptians and North Africans, there is the fact that until recently they felt superior to the peoples of the Gulf, and few of them would have thought of settling here. Now the Emirates have become much more attractive and at the same time more restrictive in terms of immigration and citizenship policies. Many Egyptians are here as expatriates and those who stay long do so by renewing their contracts.

As an Egyptian and a political scientist, Hamdy holds strong views on Egyptian and African politics. He was scathing on Mubarak's leadership, saying he has no political imagination, no developmental vision. Egypt has become stagnant under him. He is clearly trying to groom his son, who is quite dumb, to succeed him, although he denies it while insisting his son has rights like other Egyptians. This syndrome of grooming sons for succession is, of course, evident elsewhere across Africa and is politically unhealthy—Joseph Kabila in the DRC, Faure Eyadema in Togo, and more recent similar efforts in Gabon, in Senegal with Abdoulaye Wade, and in Libya with Gaddafi. He had nothing positive to say about Gaddafi, who he considers almost deranged. He recounted the numerous dealings he had with the Libyan leader when he was in Cairo heading African studies. Once, the Libyans agreed to sponsor a conference his center was organizing on Pan-Africanism, but in exchange they wanted Gaddafi to speak by video. Hamdy said that would have to be approved by the university and government. In the end, Gaddafi didn't do it, as other pressing matters apparently came up for the great leader to attend to. Hamdy did an impersonation of Gaddafi's mannerisms and speech and we laughed. But Gaddafi's authoritarianism is no laughing matter. Local democracy in Libya is a farce, for while the neighborhood committees deliberate petty issues, all key decisions on the economy, foreign policy and other areas of national concern are made by Gaddafi. Following Bongo's death Gaddafi is now Africa's longest reigning leader and that's not a compliment. We both poked fun at Gaddafi's recent trips to Europe, his antics and male chauvinism. His African politics is equally lamentable, the way he tries to buy African leaders with cash, his cynical promotion of African unity, his phony radicalism when he surrenders to Britain and the U.S. on the nuclear issue and paid more than \$3 billion over the Pan-Am flight terrorist bombing and crash in Lockerbie, Scotland.

Hamdy was none too kind on the leaders of Africa's major countries, including South Africa. He had nothing but praise for Nelson Mandela. He was critical of Thabo Mbeki for his intellectual pretensions. He recalled his encounter with President Mbeki at a conference of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in South Africa organized by Eddy Maloka at which he, Hamdy openly stated that in Egypt nobody knew what NEPAD was. When he was invited to attend the conference, his dean, a political scientist, and three of his deputies asked what NEPAD represented, for they had never heard of it before. This underscored what was wrong with NEPAD, it was a top-down initiative with little involvement from civil society. Is it true that NEPAD is not part of public discussion in Egypt, Mbeki turned and said to the Egyptian ambassador who was sitting next to Hamdy. Hamdy hadn't known she was the ambassador. She looked with annoyance at him and told the president it wasn't widely discussed. Then make sure it is, Mbeki shot back. The ambassador took Hamdy to task for exposing Egypt. How could you do that, you know that makes us look bad against the Algerians and Libyans, she said. But it's the truth, he responded. The next day the local papers headlined, "Egyptian professor says NEPAD not known in Egypt." This put him under the spotlight and pressure when it came to his presentation on Pan-Africanism. It was probably the best presentation he has ever made, he smiled, in which he traced the history of Pan-Africanism, the ideas of people like Nkrumah and Nasser, and important documents like the Lagos Plan of Action. When Walter Oyugi from Kenya, who I knew when I taught there, and a political science colleague asked him whether he considered himself an Arab or an African, he responded quoting Nkrumah and Nasser that all the peoples of the continent were Africans and he was both an Arab and an African. The audience clapped and Oyugi almost shriveled in his chair. If Mandela is a saintly icon, then Mbeki is a philosopher king, and Jacob Zuma is a man of the people. It is under him that South Africa will be finally able or fail

to make the transition from apartheid in terms of transforming the society. The economic success of South Africa, and Southern Africa more generally, he believes strongly, is crucial for Africa, the locomotive for the continent's renewal and development. This reminded me of Ali Mazrui's contention that while North Africa led the struggle for political decolonization, the struggle for economic development would be led by southern Africa, while West Africa and East Africa would show the way for military and cultural integration, respectively.

For Pan-Africanism to advance and turn into a reality, the Cape to Cairo project has to be re-imagined as an African dream, not along the imperial fantasies of Cecil Rhodes. This entails confronting the challenges facing Afro-Arab relations and improving knowledge of each other throughout Africa. All too often, people in one country have little or no knowledge of peoples in the neighboring countries, let alone in other regions of the continent. This can partly be blamed on the educational systems, which leave students uninformed about other countries across the continent. Yet they are better informed about European and North American countries. In fact, in most cases, their knowledge of other African countries is derived from western sources. It is sad that western scholarship is so dominant within Africa itself and African intellectual communities remain weak. We both railed at the role of western Africanists for whom Africa is a testing ground for stylized western paradigms and exploited for careerist purposes rather than for building empowering knowledge.

But this does not absolve us from blame and responsibility. It is amazing to see how easily many of our intellectuals sell out to the state, how they are co-opted by our authoritarian states. He gave the example of a mutual colleague from Cameroon. When Hamdy attended a political science conference in Cameroon he was shocked to see how comfortably our colleague lived as a political appointee. The same is true in Egypt where some of the ministers and top government officials were once respected scholars who now speak for the state and justify its actions. But he was also critical of leftist intellectuals. He mentioned several prominent Egyptian radicals we both know who are feted in the international media as human rights activists and happily perform for the international gallery but hardly work with the grassroots. Mentioning one prominent feminist, he asked sardonically, when was the last time she ever worked with grassroots women to help empower them?

As for Afro-Arab relations, it is imperative, he stressed, to face the issue of slavery and the arrogance among North Africans. Arabs participated in the slave trade that brought peoples from West and East Africa to North Africa and Arabia and parts of Asia. Slavery in their societies left a legacy of superiority based on phenotype in which the rest of the continent is sometimes looked down upon. As a result, as lot of people in Egypt, and North Africa more generally, are awfully uninformed about other African countries about which they harbor terrible stereotypes. I noticed that he occasionally slipped into talking about Egypt and Africa as distinct entities. He discussed Nasser's views that Egypt was simultaneously African, Arab, and Islamic, indeed at the very center of the three circles of identity. I thought this left out Christianity.

The biggest test confronting Egypt today is its relations and negotiations over how to distribute the waters of the Nile River, he expounded. Egypt essentially wants to maintain the current position in which it gets a little over 50% of the Nile valley water resources. He believes this is a narrow and unproductive position. To base the argument on historical grounds, including the old treaties negotiated during the colonial era by the British and

Egyptians, is just as unacceptable as the Israeli argument for the occupation of Palestine on the so-called historical ground that Palestine used to be the homeland of the Jews before the dispersal two thousand years ago. Egyptians don't like to hear this argument and they seem to be oblivious to the intense and highly informed debates about the issue in East Africa among both politicians and scholars. He believes it is dangerous for Egypt and Sudan to keep insisting on some kind of veto power in the new treaty which is still in negotiation. It is also unproductive, he believes, for Ethiopia to be insisting that since it provides 65% of the waters of the Nile it should have 65% usage of the waters. All countries need to compromise and produce a treaty that will promote national and regional cooperation and development.

And we discussed many other issues, including human rights, Islam, Israel, China's role in Africa, Al-Jazeera, and Barack Obama—subjects on which he has strong views which I largely agreed with. He said it is not enough to criticize the West of hypocrisy when it comes to human rights discourses, but to expand the meaning of human rights to go beyond political and civil rights and incorporate social and economic rights. It is also crucial to emphasize that no culture, religion, or civilization has a monopoly on human rights, that all societies and cultures as well as religious traditions seek to uphold, or value, the dignity of the human person. Human dignity should be foundational to any definition of human rights. On that basis, political or economic systems that concentrate power in the hands of the few at the expense of the many cannot be viewed as promoting human rights. What's the difference, he asked, between a Hosni Mubarak who monopolizes political power and Bill Gates who monopolizes economic power, as far as human rights are concerned?

When it comes to Islam, it is critical, he insisted, to understand the different traditions and contest the hegemony enjoyed by extremist versions in the eyes of both supporters and foes of Islam. Wahhabi Islam, which rose in Saudi Arabia, insists on fundamentalist reading of Islamic faith and tradition. This is quite different from another tradition, whose name I didn't catch, which is more tolerant and even places reason as a gateway to revelation; not faith as the nullification of reason. The ascendancy of Wahhabism is directly tied to the rise of Saudi Arabia as the world's leading oil exporter. The United States and other western countries essentially turned a blind eye because of Saudi oil. The more tolerant and intellectually rich traditions of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the premier center of Islamic learning, have been eclipsed. Wahhabism has done tremendous damage, not only in the region itself but across the world. He mentioned the Grand Mufti of Nigeria, who was trained in Saudi Arabia, who helped stoke conflict between Muslims and Christians, which was previously unheard of, because of his intolerant interpretation of Islam.

On Israel, Hamdy was adamant that what is needed is a one-state not two-state solution, the creation of a truly secular democratic state. A theocratic Jewish state can be no more democratic than a theocratic Islamic one. It is strange that the same people who oppose Iran and accuse it of being undemocratic also regard the Israeli Jewish state as democratic. The creation of a two-state solution is tantamount to sanctifying Israeli apartheid.

As for China's growing influence in Africa, he sees it as a part of the new scramble for Africa. Chinese businesses are gobbling up Africa and leading to the collapse of African manufacturing, he complained. He mentioned Egypt and the Comoros as examples of Chinese encroachment. One day while at home in Cairo, he heard a knock at the door. When he opened the door he saw a woman selling items. He was about to send her away

when his wife, out of curiosity, asked him to invite her in. She laid out her wares including pajamas that were selling for as little as \$2. She didn't know much Arabic. She was Chinese. How can Egyptian manufacturers and retailers compete, he wondered? A few days ago there was a plane crash in the Comoros, and today on Al-Jazeera he saw an interview with the President of the Comoros who was praising China. The Chinese have built the parliament, stadium, and other infrastructure in his nation island, while the West only comes to give lectures. In exchange for all this assistance, China is of course grabbing resources, including land, across the continent. This is dangerous for Africa, Hamdy thinks; it represents a new form of imperialism.

To my surprise, he was quite critical of Al-Jazeera for being critical of everybody else except Qatar, where it is based. It preaches against tyranny across the Arab world yet it dares not criticize the Qatari ruling dynasty that established it. It seems particularly critical of Egypt, but Egypt is in fact a lot more liberal, culturally, than Qatar and the other Gulf states. As for Barack Obama, he was impressed by his Cairo speech, but he doubts whether his administration will bring any meaningful structural changes at home and abroad. He wanted to know how he is perceived among African Americans and I gave him the divergent perspectives informed by the dynamics of African-American history, class, and ideology.

He seems homesick. He misses the cultural and intellectual vibrancy of Cairo. He is quite clear that he is here largely for the money to educate his children. His daughter is attending the branch campus of Michigan State University while his son goes to the International American School, which we passed on the way from Festival City to Uptown and back to my hotel. He was impressed by the educational programs of the school, including study abroad opportunities. Currently his son is in Kenya on a school trip. The kids raised money that will help rebuild a rural school and provide it with Internet capabilities. A part of me couldn't help being astonished at how even the most critical of us happily suspend our anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism when it comes to the education of our own children.

As we returned to the hotel we returned to African politics, the troubling dynastic tendencies, resurgence of coups, and Hamdy's concerns for Egypt. Recently, there have been coups in Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, and Madagascar. And Somalia remains a failed state. In Egypt, democracy is held back by fears, perpetrated and shared by both the ruling elites and their western backers, including the new Obama Administration that fully democratic elections will lead to the victory of the Islamic Brotherhood, loss of the country's position as the broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and abandonment of neo-liberal policies. So much for the elites' and the West's pretentious commitment to democracy.

When he dropped me off we agreed that he would call me to arrange for a meeting with his colleague who he had suggested could help me with my research. He seemed quite invigorated from our long day of intellectual exchanges. The life of the mind does indeed have its compensations. As I ate dinner by myself, as always, in the restaurant, our conversation continued reverberating in my thoughts.

July 3, 2009

If my first full day here offered a feast of insight on Afro-Emirati history from a native scholar-activist and the second day provided ample intellectual delights with an expatriate

Egyptian academic, today presented a splendid tour of this proverbial shopper's paradise by a cosmopolitan diaspora Cameroonian. Linda Alange Abety came to pick me up around 1:00 p.m. as arranged. For the next eight hours she took me all over the city, which she obviously loves and where she has lived for the past seven years.

When I went to meet her in the reception area I initially didn't recognize her. With long brown hair, she looked much taller with her high heels. Her contacts also looked bluer, which, with her hair and height, made her look a little different from how I remembered her in Madrid where we ran into each in the elevator at the Ritz Madrid. But the wide smile was the same and so was the soft British accent. Welcome to Dubai, she stretched her arms and gave me a hug. The staff in the reception pretended not to look. Surely hugging is not taboo, I wondered to myself.

She seemed truly excited as we got into her jeep and drove off. Years ago, she explained, this used to be the poorest part of the city. It is no longer, as the gravity of wealth and luxury has shifted to the Jumeirah coast where she first took me to. Driving through Sheikh Zayed Road gave me a full glimpse of Dubai's emerging urban grandeur. She pointed to the landmark buildings, beginning with the Dubai World Trade Center, which in its days of singular glory was the city's sole claim to a skyscraper, but has now been totally eclipsed by the surrounding towers including the iconic Emirates Towers, a string of majestic hotels and office and residential high-rises. Among them is the 21st Century Tower that houses the flight attendants of the Emirates Airline that Linda used to work for when she first came to Dubai. She pointed to various buildings along the road, including Burj Dubai (since renamed Burj Khalifa), the world's tallest building, the Dubai International Financial Centre, and we drove past exits to Dubai Internet City, Dubai Media City, and the Knowledge Village. The buildings invariably proclaim their individuality through their distinctive architecture and the ways in which western and futuristic motifs incorporate Islamic styling and patterning.

Then we took Al Sufouh Road towards the Palm Jumeirah, the extraordinary palm islands reclaimed from the sea for the truly rich and famous. There are dozens of sumptuous hotels in various stages of completion, including the South African-owned Atlantis resort that resembles its namesake in the Bahamas. Nearby is the Dubai Marina, which provides hundreds of berths for luxury yachts and is surrounded by soaring buildings, restaurants, and cafés. We briefly got out of the car in several locations to gawk at this staggering, almost sickening opulence. Some of the buildings looked empty, ghostly tributes to overindulgence and the recession. Apparently, property values have dropped by more than half and have not yet hit bottom. Just a year ago, some of these homes cost up to \$10 or 20 million, Linda said in mock awe.

From there we drove to another beautiful beach front, full of promenades, cafés, and high-rises. We went into one restaurant for a late lunch. They served fresh, organic food and I ordered a shrimp salad that was truly delicious. Linda saved the visit to Umm Suqeim for last. This is where the landmark and now legendary Burj Al Arab, the sail-shaped seven star hotel reputed to be the best hotel in the world, is located. If you are not a guest you apparently get charged to enter, so we didn't bother. Instead we went to the nearby Madinat Jumeirah, a fabulous resort where the two hotels and numerous villas that invoke traditional Arabian architecture face each other and are crisscrossed by waterways. We took a boat ride that went around the complex. Linda decided she would spend her birthday here, in about two weeks. On our way back I spotted the restaurant "The Game," which is apparently South African-owned and where a lot of Africans gather to eat roast meat and listen to African music. Further up is the Souk Madinat Jumeirah that seeks to reproduce the

atmosphere of old souks, but with air conditioning. We looked around before stopping for drinks of fruit juices. She often comes here to chill with friends, she said.

Linda was born in England while her father was studying for his first PhD. He later got a second PhD in the United States. At age five she and her parents went back to Cameroon, and then they sent her back to England for education at age sixteen. She has been away since then, although she visits Cameroon quite often and remains very close to her family. She talked fondly of her father and said they are very close. She readily admitted she is a daddy's girl, although she never hesitated to challenge him. She is the first born. Her father is a polygamist, which took me a little by surprise. He has two children by her mother, three by his second wife, and one by his third wife. Later, I learned her mother divorced him because she didn't want to be in a polygamous marriage, although her parents remain friends. She talked proudly of her mother, how she is so pretty and how well she has maintained herself. When they are together people mistake them for sisters. She recalled one time when she visited her and they came to a restaurant at Madinat Jumeirah. A German man took to her mother and she played along with him, until she revealed she was with her daughter and he almost fell out of his chair. He thought she was about 30 years old!

Linda's father is a strict traditionalist, she said, laughing. He is always trying to give her advice and run her life from afar, but he is sweet. When she first came to Dubai he was quite uneasy, saying she was too young to be living so far away from home, until she reminded him she had been away since she was sixteen. When she told him she wanted to buy an apartment; he tried to dissuade her, saying she should be thinking of coming back home to settle. She told him she planned to stay in Dubai for a while and she would think of buying property in Cameroon once she actually returned there, that now this is where she is living. When he came to visit her in Dubai he couldn't quite bring himself to commend her until she teased it out of him. She knows he is very proud of her, but he is sometimes too old fashioned to express it.

She studied at the University of Birmingham where she got a degree in international trade. She did an internship in Kentucky where she lived for seven months—long enough to know that she didn't want to work in banking. She applied for a job with Emirates Airlines for an adventure. Seven years later she is still in Dubai, although now she works for the presidential air service. She was amazed at how lavishly Emirates treats its employees—the salary was great and tax free. The furnished apartments were wonderful and the travel to different countries and cities was exciting. They also provided excellent training opportunities. She applied for the presidential service for a new experience. It's been incredible, she said. She has been able to meet prominent leaders and personalities from around the world. The opportunity to meet and deal with people from all walks of life, from kings and presidents to ordinary people, has been extremely educational. The royals treat the airline employees with the utmost respect, often asking politely for services.

This is not common, for she hears horror stories from colleagues working for other royals in the region who can be insufferably arrogant and demanding. They expect you to be at their beck and call, to provide any service they want—you know what I mean, she said with disgust. I could never do that, she swore, even if they offered me \$2 million. The only downside with her current job is that, unlike with the Emirates, she doesn't fly often. Tomorrow will be her first flight in three weeks. That must give you a lot of free time to do other things, I said. Yes, except that she is not really off so she has to be around in case she is called for a flight. One of her co-workers once went drinking with friends

and they called, giving her six hours' notice. She confessed she had drunk two glasses of wine. Flight attendants are not supposed to report to work having ingested alcohol. They don't mind if you tell them. Her friend was excused and they got somebody else. But you can't do that too often. Nevertheless, she has been able to set up a hairstyling business on the side to occupy herself. She is also studying for hospitality management online, for she wants to set up a hospitality business once she returns to Cameroon.

She loves living in Dubai and has no regrets that she came. She loves the country for its diversity, tolerance, and economic opportunities arising out of its phenomenal growth. You get everything here, people, goods, and services from around the world. This is a truly cosmopolitan city, the world in a microcosm, an example of how people should live together, where nobody bothers you because of your nationality, race or religion. It makes places like the U.S. or Britain look provincial and parochial. She has friends from around the world and loves to entertain and take visitors around, including her relatives when they visit. Ironically, she finds it hard to relate with Cameroonians in Dubai, many of whom she finds rather narrow-minded. They cling together and sometimes with other Africans in a few locations around the city and refrain from mixing with others. Sometimes they will live several in an apartment, like they are in some poverty-stricken village, apparently to save money. They end up living here but do not really get to know the society. Since she came here she has only managed to befriend one Cameroonian.

Linda first met the Cameroonian woman's father, who asked her to help his daughter who was coming to study in Dubai. So she contacted the young woman when she arrived and tried to take her under her wing. She, however found a boyfriend, a Cameroonian businessman who was poorly educated and who seemed resentful of Linda's influence and her independence. The poor girl got pregnant. Fortunately, she had finished her studies by then but, given the strict attitudes toward such matters among employers here, Linda advised her to return to Cameroon before she was found out. But before she could leave—together with the boyfriend, she insisted—the boyfriend was arrested. Using her contacts with highly placed people, Linda found out that her friends' boyfriend had been arrested because he had failed to pay a fine for a drunken driving charge despite repeated warnings. Linda refused to lend her friend bailout money, for she had warned her that he was not good for her. The friend was devastated by her boyfriend's irresponsibility, especially in view of the fact that they had spent a lot of money buying things to take to Cameroon, including a car. The car was sold and she bailed him out. It's been more than a year since they returned to Cameroon and Linda hasn't heard from her. But no news is sometimes good news, she concluded, I hope she is okay.

For women in the airline industry, it is hard to get a good man, she lamented. African men tend to assume that if you are a flight attendant you are loose. So you have to be quite choosy, get a partner who is secure as a person and who has resources to meet you in different places if necessary. Such men are hard to find, she said. Moreover, African men tend to be very chauvinistic. They want a woman who is virtually their servant. Even those who have been abroad a long time would rather go back home and pick a village woman who they think will be grateful and subservient for being brought to Europe or America. She saw it with her own cousin who she stayed with in Kentucky. He went back to Cameroon and brought a wife who did everything for him, and within a short time she was pregnant. She was barely twenty, Linda's own age at the time. These men want you to get pregnant year in and year out and the only training they want you to get is for some low-skilled job as a medical assistant. She can't believe that young African men still

have such archaic beliefs. It might be forgivable for their conservative traditionalist fathers, but it is not acceptable for the younger generation.

Linda's fiancé, who is Cameroonian, has been saved by his Canadian upbringing. He seems to get it, otherwise she would not be engaged to him. He has even accepted to come and live in Dubai for at least three years after they are married before they finally decide where to live. His family lives in Montreal and his mother can't understand why Linda doesn't want to move to Canada. She went there to visit but found the place boring compared to Dubai. Certainly she couldn't get a job that would pay as well as her current job. She has told her fiancé that if she left Dubai, the place she would really like to live is Cameroon. Initially he didn't seem to understand why she would want to return to Cameroon. *Because it is home*, she told him, and she sees tremendous opportunities there for business; better than in Britain whose citizenship she carries, or in Canada where he is a citizen. He seems to be slowly getting her point. She showed me his picture, a fine young couple smiling into each other's eyes. How I wished that were Natasha!

This is Linda's second engagement. Her first engagement was to an Arab man, as she called him, from Dubai. She was really in love with him but her family, especially her father, was opposed. They are Catholics and the idea of her marrying a Muslim was deeply troubling for them. And an Arab to boot! What would I do if my daughter, who I told her about, came to me with a similar scenario, she asked? I would try to be supportive, I replied, after some reflection. That's what my father said, that he would support me if I really wanted to go ahead, but I knew he would be terribly disappointed. Now I appreciate it more than I did at the time, the fact that marriage is not simply between two individuals but a union between families. Being the first born I knew I had to set a good example, she sighed. My future parents-in-law have met her relatives and her fiancé has been doing the rounds as well meeting her relatives. He is almost done, she laughed. He will have a lot of explaining to do, my father recently told me, if he ever mistreats you or tries to divorce you, she said. I guess this is a kind of marriage insurance, she said thoughtfully. Maybe that's why marriages that just involve two individuals don't last, she added. That would probably have been the fate of her relationship had she married her Arab fiancé. He used to say that she didn't have to conform to his culture. But she wasn't too sure. His mother and sisters all behaved and dressed like typical Muslim women, except when his sisters were abroad. One time when she was in Geneva she had a suite for a month and one of his sisters stayed with her. She went buck wild — smoking and drinking. She sees this all the time among many women from the Gulf. She didn't want to be bottled up by tradition and only have freedom to be herself when abroad.

When her father came to visit her Arab fiancé's family, he was taken aback. They were black. All along I hadn't guessed either. Afro-Arabs, she explained, are no different from other Arabs. They are as much Arab as African Americans are American. It's even deeper here. They are fully integrated; their culture and behavior are no different from the other Arabs. They are not discriminated against to the same degree as African Americans are, so they are not forced to behave differently and they do not seek to be different. There are a lot of Afro-Arabs in the Gulf. Once you have lived here long enough, you can always tell them apart from us. Usually they dress, speak, and behave like their fellow Arabs. I really wanted to press her further, but I didn't want to sound as if I was interviewing her.

As she was coming to drop me off back at the hotel we stopped by another mall for her to get magazines for her flight tomorrow. They can only get supplies from designated shops. In the mall it felt like I was back in India. Indians are everywhere here, she said,

both rich and poor Indians. I bought the latest edition of *New African* and *African Business* and I realized my first comment on the bookstore I went to in the Mall of Dubai had been harsh and unrepresentative. This was a sizeable bookstore with an ample collection of books and magazines from different countries. I saw Mandela's biography and autobiography and a few other African titles.

We had almost reached the entrance to the hotel when she asked me about what I thought of Madonna's recent adoptions in Malawi. She was totally disgusted by the behavior of these celebrities who think they have a right to buy children from Africa as if we are still in the days of slavery, who acquire children as accessories. The anger in her voice was unmistakable. But she softened considerably when the subject changed to an accident she had about a year ago. She was driving her convertible when she was hit; her car spun more than three times and she just let go until it came to a stop. She broke down in tears and did not pay any mind to the people banging on her door and windows. They were tears of relief and joy that she was still alive. That's when she decided to trade in for a sturdier, less fancy car. It was a sign, she said in a whisper that life was not yet done with her. That's why she would like to do something meaningful with her life, to help develop Africa. It is not enough to pick up one or two children and think you are bringing development, she said, returning to Madonna. That's selfish. Imagine what she could do with the money she will use to bring up these two kids, or the \$19 million she is reported to have used to buy her way to acquire them.

As she hugged me by her car in front of the reception I marveled at the complex portrait of a young African diasporan woman she represented. Once again, I thought of Natasha. The Afropolitans have indeed arrived.

July 4, 2009

I decided to take the day off and relax by myself. So following breakfast I sat on the hotel balcony for a while before running inside for cool air. It was foggy so that I could hardly make out the buildings on the other side of the creek. They said on the news that Dubai was getting enveloped by dust from the wind storms ravaging Iraq. I could see a few people in a couple of the yachts moored by the berths at the edges of the hotel.

The room soon became boring, so I decided to brave the sun and walk to the Festival City mall a little less than a mile away from the hotel. Halfway through, I started cursing my foolishness. My shirt was getting drenched. The roads were difficult to cross and walking towards the stop sign would have taken me even longer. I must have looked like one of those poor laborers from India or East Africa to the people whizzing by in their air-conditioned cars and SUVs. Every third or fourth car looked like a luxury vehicle and many of the drivers looked male.

When I entered the mall I panted heavily as if I had been running. The cool air felt so good that I decided I was not doing that again. The idea of just hanging around the mall without purpose seemed ridiculous, so I decided to do some shopping. I have been looking for a gold bracelet since the old one I bought in Cairo in 2002 broke more than a year ago. So I started looking for jewelry stores. I could, of course, have checked the directory, but that would have made the process too purposeful so I just walked around fascinated by all the commotion. Carrefour, a large discount store that looked like Wal-Mart, was packed with shoppers from all over, mostly South Asians and Africans. People were piling

goods on their overloaded carts as if there was no tomorrow, or as if they had not heard of the recession. Linda told me Africans come to shop at this mall. One of the oldest malls in the city, its goods are relatively cheaper than the newer and fancier malls. I went around and stopped by several men's shops. The clothes, including suits, did indeed seem relatively cheap, certainly when compared to Chicago prices. Unlike in the U.S., and although this city lives by shopping, the shop attendants were laid back. I did not intend to buy any clothing until I stumbled into Giordano, which stocks casual cotton, linen shirts, and slacks that are perfect for summer, and which I love. I almost bought a couple of pairs before I remembered my mission to find a gold bracelet. So I proceeded on my hunt, bumping into more Africans and Afro-Emiratis of all colors, ages, gender and social comportment. I noticed that while many of the Africans were carrying shopping bags, the Afro-Emiratis were mostly loitering around with friends and family.

Predictably, I found solace in a bookstore at the corner of the second floor. For some strange reason I felt so much better that it was as large as any you could find in a mall in Chicago. Perhaps it was a relief that there is more to this society than mindless consumption. But it was largely empty. That didn't deter me. All the predictable western thriller writers were there. The non-fiction books mostly featured biographies of American and European politicians and celebrities, and popular studies of these societies. There were occasional titles on India, China, and Japan, and glossy table books on the Gulf States. Africa and Latin America were virtually absent. Perhaps they are featured in the Arab language section, which I couldn't read of course, I said to myself. Popular bookstores are a good indicator of regional and global cultural and intellectual hegemonies and hierarchies. The record store, Virgin, was not much better, except at least here the American music that blared from the ceiling seemed to attract buyers, the most effective seemed to be African-American hip hop. Music is the only art form in which Africa, and the African diaspora, especially have registered a powerful global presence. It speaks to the preeminence and indomitability of music and dance among the expressive cultures of African peoples that nothing—not slavery, not colonialism, not poverty—has succeeded in destroying. The record store had more people than the bookstore. But even more crowded were the restaurants and cafés. Friday is the equivalent of a Sunday here when people hang out after mosque services.

Finally, I found the jewelry store section. The stores were as immaculate as their precious displays. As far as I could tell the prices seemed lower than in Chicago, but being in no hurry and in an effort to do a little window shopping before making a purchase, which I rarely do, I went into four different shops. The prices and designs were the same, so it all boiled down to a matter of liking the sales people in one shop more than the other. I haggled a little and got the bracelet 10% cheaper than the listed price. Haggling and discounts are all a gimmick in the end, but they are the spice of shopping that turn a commercial exchange into a social transaction.

I convinced myself that the bracelet would look nice with the shirts and slacks from Giordano, so I returned to the store and selected three pairs that altogether cost less than what I had paid for one pair in Miami, Florida when Cassandra and I went for holiday there in December 2007. It would take one hour to make alterations, the Filipino woman who was serving me said reassuringly. In the jewelry store it was also a Filipino woman who enticed me to buy the bracelet.

While waiting I went to the café located in the middle of the mall, from which one could command views of people going up and down the escalators. It was next to a playground where parents left kids to have some fun while they watched and chatted or

snuck away for a quick purchase. There were groups of Afro-Emirati teenage boys by themselves and teenage girls also by themselves, whose behavior and appearance would not look out of place in Chicago except for their abayas and thawbs. Similarly, the African men and women walking together or separately moved as if they were back in Nairobi or Lagos or wherever they were from. One African woman had a baby on her back while pushing an over-stuffed trolley. Beside me were two young men who looked like Somalis whose conversation switched in every sentence from Somali to English. For the hour that I sat there, I found the display of convivial multiculturalism quite fascinating. And the food—fish and chips—was not too bad.

I could hardly believe it when I took a taxi back to the hotel that I had been at the mall for nearly four hours. Natasha would be shocked if she heard that! But what else does one do here? I had planned to go to the museum but it is closed today and the concierge said it is quite small and one could be done within an hour. Maybe I can try tomorrow. When I got back to my room I found a message from Hamdy saying that his colleague, Dr. Nasr Arif, chair of Islamic Studies Department at Zayed University who had agreed to offer his assistance and facilitate my research, was back from Abu Dhabi and they wanted to drop by the hotel. When I called him he said they would come around 8:00 p.m., barely an hour away. The idea of conducting an interview or a serious intellectual conversation didn't seem too attractive.

I was pleasantly surprised, when I met Hamdy and Nasr in the lobby, that they did not intend to spend the next few hours sitting with me in the hotel talking scholarship. They wanted to take me out and show me Dubai at night. I was quite excited until I realized what that meant. Nasr is also Egyptian and he has been in Dubai much longer than Hamdy. He is slightly shorter than Hamdy, but taller than me. His eyes squint when he laughs, which he does with frequent ease. We established quick rapport by commiserating about the thankless job of being department chair. He has been chair for nine years. You get to see the worst among your colleagues, we readily agreed. But there are compensations, too, in getting to know the intellectual work of your colleagues that can broaden your own research and thinking. As we drove through the city, Nasr gave his distinctive take on Dubai. Indian dominance was not new, he said. It goes back to ancient days when the peoples of the Gulf relied on trade with the subcontinent. They may have been Arab, but they had more contacts along the sea with India than across the desert of the Arabian Peninsula with Egypt, for instance.

During the colonial era, the British colonization of the region was undertaken from India and Indians were brought to establish or operate the colonial infrastructure. Besides the Indians, Iranians also have a long historical presence in the Gulf. Today, Iranians control more than 6,000 businesses in Dubai and the other Emirates. The only African country with a major business presence in contemporary Dubai is South Africa. There is a sizeable community of South African whites and a growing number of South African blacks. Like Hamdy, he was highly complementary of the visionary leadership of Dubai's rulers. They both talked about an Egyptian minister who came to visit and they met with him. He was a former colleague of theirs at Cairo University. They couldn't believe it when he was praising Mubarak's foresighted leadership and attacked Dubai for pursuing a mirage, and they told him so. Poor leadership has killed Egypt and allowed the UAE to steam ahead with its far more shrewd leadership.

Nasr and Hamdy took me to a mall, in fact two malls. The first was Mall of the Emirates, which is not only spectacular with its designer stores and marble floors, but also boasts

the world's largest indoor snow park called Ski Dubai. It was eerie sitting by the window looking at the people—adults and children—skiing and playing snow games when it was around 45 degrees Celsius outside. It was insane. The restaurant facing the snow park is attached to a hotel and is rather unique. It is, in fact, a large open space of several restaurants with islands of kitchens preparing different foods—Italian, Thai, Chinese, Arab and Indian. We ordered Thai soup and combined seafood. Although I was not hungry Nasr's delight in showing us this place compelled me to eat. Hamdy has never seen the snow park before and he too was aghast with surprise.

Then we drove across town to the Ibn Battuta Mall, another extravagant shopping Mecca divided into themed representations of the countries visited by the legendary Moroccan traveler. The countries represented include India, China, Persia, and Egypt, and there is a small exhibition of his travels. We joked that perhaps this is the only way to teach this generation some history! What is striking about the maps of his sojourns is the connection between the old worlds of North, West, and East Africa and western, southern, and eastern Asia. The only featured parts of so-called Europe are Spain and Turkey. The conceit that Europe is a separate continent is quite mindboggling when you come to think of it. This is nothing more than an outpost of Asia, which, in the days of Ibn Battuta, was largely marginalized. I noticed that many of the shop assistants looked like East or West Africans. They were mostly women. The shops were still open, although it was around 11:00 p.m.

When they dropped me back to the hotel I swore not to go near another mall anytime soon. Dubai has malled me out!

July 5, 2009

Aisha came to visit me at the hotel with a friend, Abeer Basharahil, who was wearing an elegantly embroidered abaya, while Aisha had on a shirt and khaki pants. We sat in the lounge and ordered some tea. She brought me several of her publications and a presentation she recently gave on the evolution of the Afro-Emirati community which traces its history from slavery and the days of pearl diving to the contemporary period of mass consumption and privileged citizenship in a booming economy which imports massive labor supplies of both professionals and laborers from around the world especially South Asia.

In our discussion, resumed from where we had left off, she elaborated on the dynamics of slavery in the Emirates. There are no exact figures, and the numbers were not large since the general population itself was small. She reiterated that the Africans became assimilated into the cultures of their respective "tribes" and did not develop as a racial minority. Total assimilation was in fact part of their efforts to achieve equality with their masters. The lack of racial categorization and tension is even attested to in the British documents. The only identifying elements of difference they retained were their skin color and music, which served as a crucial medium of retaining and passing on cultural memory. She talked about the importance of both the instruments themselves and songs as repositories of memory, myths, spirituality, and knowledge. Overall, no accurate accounts of slavery in the Gulf exist because of the silence around the subject, but its existence cannot be denied.

She briefly mentioned and discusses in one of her papers the various forms of manumission that made Gulf slavery quite different from slavery in the Americas. The

first is *al-'atq* in which the slave holder declared the slave a free person in the presence of a third party. This would often happen when a slave holder was trying to repent on his deathbed. The second involved the holder promising the slave future freedom in his will upon death. The third entailed a written agreement between the slave and slave holder promising freedom upon paying a certain sum of money. The fourth involved freedom for the child of a slave woman with a slave holder although she only gained freedom herself if freed by the slave holder or upon his death. But she could not be sold or pawned again. The fifth involved giving freedom to a slave as a form of atonement or reparation for violations of Islamic laws. The sixth represented a form of state bail in which the state purchased slaves and freed them. The final form involved freedom for slaves subjected to unjustified assault. The transformation in the lives of the Afro-Emiratis has been as dramatic as for the other Emiratis. In the 1960s they lived in housing made of palm materials, now they live in posh neighborhoods and fully participate in all walks of national life and are as caught up in the new consumer culture as the rest of the population.

She stressed the need to focus on Afro-Emirati women. General studies of diasporas tend to be androcentric. Women's experiences were not only different, but their memories are crucial to a fuller historical reconstruction of the Afro-Emirati experience in all its complexity. Women are often the carriers of culture and they hold their families and communities together in the absence of the men who, in the pre-oil days, were engaged in pearl diving. She has been collecting women's stories as articulated in music and poetry and ritual performances. The picture that emerges is one of complex negotiations of gender relations and Afro-Emirati identities. She insists on using the terms *Afro-Emirati* or *Afro-Gulf* rather than *black*, for the latter emphasizes racial classifications that do not have the salience of the Americas. She noted Mazrui's suggested nomenclature — *Gulfrica* and *Afrabia* — which she thought were rather cute but did not foreground the African part of the identity, which to her is crucial.

I wanted to know the extent of Afro-Emirati connections around the Gulf. There is not much in terms of formal associations as such, she replied, but many families have relatives around the Emirates scattered during the days of slavery and now through new patterns of regional and residential migration.

Abeer did not do much talking in connection with Aisha's more scholarly pronouncements, but she readily contributed when discussing recent economic and social changes in Dubai and comparing the nature of race relations in Dubai and the U.S. We even managed to throw Michael Jackson into the mix. She recently set up her own business called Signature Hotels Consulting and Services where she employs four people. The business is doing well. Recently she and Aisha were in Turkey to look at hotels as part of her business.

Aisha talked of her astonishment when she met Afro-Turks. It's amazing how we all get shocked to meet diasporan Africans from countries we least expect. It's not just us, of course, but others too, she said. She told the story of what happened to her when a plane she was on once made an emergency landing in Beirut. When she showed the immigration officials her UAE passport they didn't believe her. Where did you get this, where are you really from?, they bombarded her with questions. I am from Dubai, she told them. But where are your parents from, where were you born. Dubai, she repeated. They took her aside while attending to the other passengers who they didn't inquisition. In the end they let her in, but by then she was furious. One more reason we need the world to know that we belong everywhere, I said. We have to start with ourselves as African peoples

to become more aware of each other's presence in different regions and countries around the world. She talked of her pleasant surprise to learn of old African communities in Korea and China at the TADIA conference in Goa in 2006. Not recent migrants?, I asked, registering my own surprise. No, she responded, old ones, check the articles in the conference proceedings, she gestured. I certainly will! That's the beauty of these travels, I realize how much there is to learn.

As we said farewell, Aisha gave me a shopping bag of chocolate from Turkey, dates from the Emirates and Arabian perfume to give to my wife. She apologized that she had not been able to organize people from the community for me to meet and talk to. This is a bad time in the Gulf, for everyone is traveling and on holiday. Next time I come, preferably in winter, she will be able to do so. She would certainly like me to meet her family. They gather every Friday. It's a pity, she said, we had not connected in time last Friday. I thanked her for the gifts and her generosity and felt bad that I had nothing to reciprocate.

In the evening I went to the Thai restaurant in the hotel for dinner. It had a nice ambience and the food, especially the soup, was good. But the company of the dozen or so people sitting at the next table was too giddy and noisy for my comfort. They sounded like Americans on their first trip abroad out of some cornfield state.

All in all, it has been a good visit. Of all the places I have visited on this trip this is one where I would love to come back for holiday with Cassandra and even Natasha.

July 6, 2009

I had the whole morning and early afternoon free. I used the time to update my website by posting new commentaries and to pack for the next leg of the trip. I checked out of the hotel at 2:00 p.m. The cost was so much lower than in Doha, which only reinforced my desire to come back to Dubai for vacation one of these days.

I was driven to the airport by the same driver who took me to the Dubai Women's College to meet Aisha on my first full day here. We chatted like old friends. I hope you come back for holiday, he said as he dropped me off, next time with your wife, she would love the shopping. Cassandra is not really into shopping, but she will like this place, I said to myself. I smiled and gave him his fare and a generous tip.

The airport was packed, save for the check-in area for Oman Air. The attendant said my luggage was overweight by 10 kilograms. I gave him my most endearing smile and explained nobody had raised the issue before through all my trips. I showed him my long itinerary and he seemed impressed. He turned to his colleague sitting at the next counter, a Chinese looking woman. She whispered something to him and nodded. He returned to his desk and printed my ticket and baggage tags. Have a good trip to Muscat, he smiled.

The departure gate for Muscat was empty. There were still two hours until departure, so I decided to walk around. Some people slept on the benches or were curled up on the floor; many more were looking for or rushing to their departure gates or doing last minute shopping or helping themselves to some food. In the end I sat in a café and ordered a large cappuccino. By the time I returned to the gate, more people had gathered, but it looked like it would be a half-empty flight, which it was.

Oman

July 6, 2009

Muscat is so close, yet so far away from Dubai. Close in terms of distance, but the airport was far in terms of size, scale, and sophistication. All the passengers from my flight fit into one bus to the arrivals terminal, a handsome, white building with an Islamic roof and wall patterns. The heat seemed a little less oppressive, but it was nice all the same to get into the air-conditioned building.

Ours was the only flight at that time so there were no lines for immigration and passport control. I got my visa free. The only question I was asked was how long I planned to stay. Once I got my luggage and out of the baggage claim, I looked for a taxi stand. I couldn't see it and stopped by a café to ask. The young man walked out with me and showed me where the taxis were. They are not cheap, he said. I can call a friend to pick you up. Before I could say anything, he pulled out a cell phone. Fortunately or unfortunately, his friend was not there. The prepaid fare turned out to be 7.50 rials, which didn't seem exorbitant although the one rial is more than \$2.50. Before going through immigration I had changed my remaining 400 dhiram for 40 rials.

The driver looked like an Afro-Omani. In fact, I saw several Afro-Omanis among the airport workers and the people waiting for arriving passengers. The two-lane road from the airport laid out an unmistakable, rocky, desert terrain, notwithstanding the shoulder of hardy trees along the road itself. In the distance was a range of bare, brown mountains and hills which contrasted sharply with the bright midsize office and residential buildings in the foreground, which wore their Islamic heritage proudly. Most of them looked new. As seen in some African capitals, the various embassies were announced by road signs as we passed by—Iraq, Palestine, South Africa, and so on.

The Ramada Hotel was a far cry from the hotels I have stayed in during this trip, more like the hotels in Europe last summer. I cancelled my booking at the Muscat Intercontinental because of its cost. My experience in Doha merely confirmed the wisdom of such a decision. The reception lounge area, and restaurant are all small and adjacent to one another. The staff is warm in their own reserved way. The room is quite large and comfortable. Above all, it is spotlessly clean, although I would have preferred a double bed rather than two twin beds. I found a bowl of fruits that I helped myself to. Having been deprived of nearby places to walk to in both Doha and Dubai, I took the opportunity to survey my surroundings for a little over half an hour. I only bumped into one dark-skinned man carrying a bag on his back. He asked me if I was from India.

For some reason I didn't feel hungry enough for dinner, nor for much else. I can't wait for the lessons of Oman, which, of all the Gulf States, has the strongest historical links with East Africa where an Omani empire was established with its headquarters in Zanzibar.

July 7, 2009

This was a long, fascinating day spent with a passionate, intriguing scholar. He had warned me when we talked last evening that he was a straight shooter who spoke bluntly and didn't suffer fools. That indeed he is. But I must have put him at ease quite quickly because his initial caution, bordering on suspicion, soon melted with warmth. By the end of our ten hours together we were talking with the confident and comfortable familiarity of old friends. I think it's because I showed him that I listened and was genuine in my interest to learn.

Professor Ibrahim Noor teaches in the Department of Art Education at Sultan Qaboos University. He came to pick me up at the hotel in his SUV. He was not amused by the hotel staff for not giving him clear directions to the hotel and he told them so. He barely managed to give me a welcoming smile. As the day progressed, I saw a very friendly and generous man. I would have been here in time if it were not for these idiots, he cursed as we got into the car. He was only fifteen minutes late. We had arranged to meet at 10:30 a.m.

I see you were born in Zimbabwe, grew up in Malawi, and you are now a Canadian citizen, he said as if warning me not to bullshit him. I can see you Googled me, I said with a faint smile. I try not to learn too much about people with whom I am scheduled to meet for these interviews as a way to avoid developing misconceptions about them. Let's talk as we go pick up my son, he commanded. So what brings you to Oman, he asked.

I was introduced to Ibrahim by another Omani professor, Mohammed Al-Arm, whose contact I was given by Rogaia. Al-Arm put me in touch with Ibrahim because he was going to be out of the country during the time of my visit. From the very first e-mail, I knew Ibrahim was going to be a fascinating interlocutor. Not only did he bluntly tell me I was coming to Oman at the wrong time when it was too hot and most people were on vacation, but he questioned what I meant by African Diaspora or people of African descent. If you mean people who are of pure Bantu ancestry, for example, you might not find them here, as most of them have intermarried with the Arabs over the generations, he said. And he categorically told me the fee for a research assistant was inadequate, given the low value of the dollar. I responded carefully, conceding the bad timing and the low rate, but noted this is the only time I could come and the rate could be adjusted. I explained that in the project, *African* is defined as anybody with ancestry from anywhere on the continent from South Africa to Egypt and added that people from different parts of the continent may of course have different ways of articulating their identities outside the continent in certain countries and world regions, which itself is of analytical interest to me.

Ibrahim agreed with my broad formulation of the problematique. He went on to argue that while we must not accept Eurocentric paradigms of identity, likewise, the geographical definition of Africa ending at the Red Sea has its deficiencies, not simply because the Red Sea is just a "crack" but also because the histories of the peoples of Arabia and Africa have been extremely intertwined for millennia. The last Ethiopian rule in Yemen, for example, ended in the sixth century; several times over the centuries Yemen also ruled Ethiopia and both Ethiopians and Arabians originate from the same Semitic ancestry, speak similar languages and share many cultural traits. Can we accept one as African and reject the other. So where does one draw the line?! Likewise, South Arabians have been among the first to immigrate to the east African coast, long before the Bantus—who comprise the majority in East Africans today—reached the Great Lakes from Cameroon. In short, it would require one to be brave and to defy narrow Eurocentric definition of *African* in order to be inclusive, he advised. To be sure, there will be many, here in Arabia as well

as Europe and America who would disagree with me. But these are the same people who would not accept that Moses comes from Africa — Egypt yes, Africa no! — and they are the same people who tell us that Eurasia is two continents! I am sure you are aware that original innovative research has never been one without controversies, he noted.

I briefly explained the empirical dimensions of the project and stressed the conceptual challenges; that I wanted to get a better understanding of the nature of scholarly discourses about Africa and Africans, Omanis and Oman, and their linkages and how these may or may not fit into constructions of the African diaspora. I was here to listen and wanted to avoid framing questions that imposed Atlanticist terms of discourse and foreclosed those more pertinent to the realities, experiences, and intellectual traditions of this part of the world. I like your approach, he said signaling a thaw. For much of the day he did most of the talking and I took copious notes.

We took the same road that had brought me from the airport and went past the airport into a posh neighborhood. We parked by the gate. Inside the driveway was a Lexus. It is a spacious and lovely three story house. On the first floor are located the kitchen and utility room, and dining room on the other side with a bathroom. It is well-furnished with cushy carpet. But what caught my attention and admiration were the huge paintings in the living and dining rooms and in the corridors. They offer bright and captivating images of the mountains and oases of water and plants. He painted them. My regard for him went up immensely at the revelation. He took me around the house to show me more paintings, including one of his earliest paintings from 1960 when he was in high school. It is a painting of a view from a deep well showing steps to the surface. This is the place Dr. Ali Mazrui mistakenly called a slave cave in his television series, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, when talking about the so-called Arab slave trade, Ibrahim said with a chuckle. In the television room, which also doubled up as a studio, there were more paintings, some unfinished. Similarly, in his large study lined with bookshelves there were more paintings.

He had stopped selling them, he said, because they were too big for houses. He had enough to open an art museum. Like you, he smiled, I am a man of many interests. I don't have enough time for all that I like to do — teaching, writing, and painting. In the course of our conversation he showed me some of the books he has written. He wished I were better in Swahili so he could give me copies. Of late, he has also developed a passion for popular writing and public engagement out of the conviction that it's not enough to produce scholarly books and articles that are of interest to a tiny minority. As intellectuals we have a responsibility to translate our ideas into meaningful public discourses. We must always try to reach a much wider audience, to help educate the public, especially the youth who are often fed so much poison. So he participates in a lot of public debates in the print and online mass media. That echoed my sentiment and I warmed up to him even more.

I knew from Aboud Jumbe that Ibrahim was from Zanzibar, but I had no idea about the permanent pall that events associated with the 1964 revolution have cast on his generation of Zanzibari refugees and émigrés. The Zanzibari diaspora in Oman is quite sizeable. It has played a crucial role in the modernization of Oman, while its dispersals have contributed to Zanzibar's underdevelopment. Forty years ago when the current ruler of Oman, Sultan Qaboos took over, Oman was two centuries behind Zanzibar in terms of levels of development, Ibrahim stated. Now it is the other way around; Oman has shot past Zanzibar. He returned repeatedly to this topic. The flight from Zanzibar has left a deep wound that seems to haunt him, coloring his perspectives on everything from African

and Omani histories to the diaspora condition to the foibles of humanity and our moral responsibility as intellectuals to speak truth to power to the redemptive power of religion. I was simultaneously moved and troubled, moved by the depths of his agony and troubled by the histories that produce such agonies, the cycles of competing victimizations his story represents.

We were served drinks by his son, a tall, young man. When I got in I had made a faux pas—I wore my sandals into the living room. Ibrahim gently explained that they do not wear shoes in the house and they use the floor in the living room for prayers. I knew that. I felt so stupid. We took his son, who has just passed his international baccalaureate, to his old school to collect or drop off some papers. He is waiting for the assignment of a scholarship and would like to study abroad. Then we drove back to the house and continued talking and had lunch. All along we were occasionally interrupted by his bubbly one-year-old daughter. He has five children. One of his daughters lives in Washington, D.C., or rather works in D.C. and lives in northern Virginia. She is a lawyer. It was quite evident that the mother of the one-year-old daughter is a more recent marriage, although I didn't probe into that, of course. Ibrahim received his undergraduate education in Uganda at Makerere University where he studied with the likes of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who he complimented for his command of Kiswahili. Ibrahim was proud of the fact that he wrote his senior thesis in Kiswahili, an act he regarded as a personal blow against the Eurocentric hegemony of English. At the time, he justified it in terms of trying to make the most sense of the Swahili literature he was analyzing.

He started painting in high school and continued through college. He recounted meeting later in Kenya a great English painter and historian whose son he encountered decades later at his current university. He is extremely knowledgeable about art and the changes in the art world over the last few decades. I also quickly discovered that he is passionate about his faith. Several times during the day he excused himself to pray and he would periodically refer to Islam or the Qur'an itself in our conversation. At one time, he gently asked me whether I had even taken a closer look at Islam. I realized my interest in Islam hadn't gone beyond readings in African history and world religions, and reactions to the post-9/11 scurrilous media characterizations of Islam.

Ibrahim lived and taught in the United States for about 30 years, mostly at Rutgers University, where at one time he served as chair of Africana Studies. He talked fondly of his students and the transformative impact he had on African-American students. He understood their deep hunger for identity and self-respect that America denies them through the lasting legacies of slavery and segregation. For them, studying Swahili, which he taught, was not simply about studying a language, but about reconnecting to their African roots. So he used his classes as a forum to teach them about history and culture and to demythologize Africa, and above all, to think critically. Some of the students he taught have kept in touch with him all these years.

The bulk of our conversation centered on East Africa and Oman. There is no way the history of East Africa and the Gulf can be understood without their deep connections that go back thousands of years, he insisted. The bonds are too deep, involving movements of people back and forth and cultural, commercial, and other types of exchanges. These exchanges have never been one-sided. In the past, people moved by boats and dhows, now they do so by ships and air, but the dynamics of interconnections remain the same as they have been for centuries. If East Africa served as a lifeline for Oman, Oman served

as a source of modernizing influences in East Africa. Out of these interactions, Islam spread and new cultural practices emerged. Because of intermarriages, which continue between people in Oman and East Africa, people in the two regions have families and relatives in both Oman and East Africa. Stringent rules against marrying foreigners were passed in Oman in the 1980s to curb the tendency of young Omani men returning from Europe with European wives, some of ill-repute and some who became lonely and subject to abuse. This didn't apply to Zanzibar and coastal East Africa and the policy may in, fact have encouraged more unions between people of the two regions.

Elaborating on what Ibrahim had stated in his e-mail message, he argued that the Indian Ocean is a sea continent complete with highways and free fuel in the form of predictable monsoon winds, which the peoples of the region, including the Arabs knew about and used for thousands of years, navigating in search of lands to settle and for trade. Yemen and Oman were in the middle of the vast sea continent and trading system in which scattered but interconnected families—trading diasporas—facilitated trade and the growth of settlements. Arabs migrated to East Africa because of population explosion, drought and war, the same reasons that the Bantus migrated to the region from Cameroon. His explanation of Arab migrations made sense, but his reading of Bantu migration was problematic and so were some of his subsequent assertions. He claimed that the Arabs preceded the Bantus along the East African coast. The problem is that he takes as a fact the story of Bantu migrations.

Bantu is a term invented by German scholars in the mid-nineteenth century and appropriated carelessly, as it has turned out, by historians who simplistically associated the spread of Bantu languages with the physical migration of Bantu-speaking peoples. Not only can languages spread without massive migrations, but many historians now question the whole thesis of Bantu migrations. I wrote a paper on this several years ago. Perhaps I should send it to him. But his larger point, shorn of claims of who arrived first (so reminiscent of Afrikaner historical claims that the Boers arrived in South Africa before the so-called Bantus), that people from Arabia have had a long history of interaction with the East African coast is correct. In fact, one could argue they belong to an identifiable cultural zone, as he argued with reference to Yemen and Ethiopia. The two have been interconnected and invading each other for thousands of years. If Yemen is indeed the homeland of the Arabs, then the connections between Arabia and Africa are much deeper than we care to admit.

It seems self-evident to me that until recent historical times, the peoples of the Indian Ocean littoral knew infinitely more about each other than about the peoples of the interior in their modern nation states. This elemental fact is not only disregarded because of the poisonous impact of Eurocentric historiography, on which Ibrahim spoke so eloquently, but it is subverted through the conventions of contemporary national historiographies that prioritize internal developments rather than external linkages. In the case of African nationalist historiography, the external is so overwhelmed with imperialism that it makes it hard to conceive pre-European engagements on their own historical terms.

While I understand where Ibrahim is coming from, that essentially he is trying to recuperate Afro-Arab connections from the suffocating shadows of Eurocentric and Afrocentric scholarship, he risks erecting Arabocentric blinds that are equally unproductive. It is not necessary to base claims of the Arab presence along the East African coast, as Ibrahim seems inclined to, on the alleged fact that the so-called Bantus arrived at the coast in the sixteenth century at the same time as the Portuguese were arriving. Recuperating Arab contributions in the history of the East African coast from the onerous weight of Eurocentric historiography and the righteous wrath of African nationalist historiography

is a worthy goal, but it must not be pursued to restore the conceit of Arab civilizational superiority.

Ibrahim lectured me on how Arabs brought development to East Africa in a vein very much reminiscent of the European civilizing mission. They brought urbanization, proven by all the city names along the East African coast which are Arabic: *Sofala* means *South*, *Mombasa* is a corruption of *Mimbasa* meaning place of difficulty, *Mwera* stands for *Mawella*, *Gedi* for *Gedde*, and we all know the meaning of *Zanzibar* and *Dar es Salaam*. He relished demolishing the conventional wisdom about Swahili, that it is a Bantu language with a veneer of Arabic vocabulary. He argued that 80% of Swahili vocabulary is Arabic, while its grammar is Bantu. He said he is currently working on a Swahili-Arabic dictionary. His preliminary findings are that 65% of the nouns, 70% of the verbs and 90% of the adjectives in Swahili are Arabic. The language developed out of pidginization and creolization, but Arabic remains dominant. I thought to myself that, on his logic, going by the names of cities in the Americas it would be hard to see the contributions of the enslaved Africans to the building and development of the Americas. Similarly, it would be hard to detect Arab influences in the rise of renaissance Europe.

The narrative did not sit well with what Ibrahim said about Oman itself. Until recently, he had said, this was a very backward society, an impoverished drought-stricken desert kingdom of warring "tribes," for whom Zanzibar, and the East African coast more generally, provided coveted opportunities and respite from war and drought. Again, it is not necessary, in my view, to make the case for Arab contributions to East Africa by emphasizing their superiority and exceptionalism: they made significant contributions to the East African coast as part of the complex mosaic of the societies that emerged along the coast. Indeed, if we took the idea of the East African coast and Arabia as integral parts of a common cultural zone, the Africanness and Arabness of the two regions would be the basis of their very constitution rather than contestation.

This speaks to the larger issue of what Africa itself means, which has bedeviled African studies and politics. The largest number of Arabs is in continental Africa so that the majority of Arabs are as much African as they are Arab, just like we could say about other African peoples: the Hausas, the Zulus; they are as much Hausa or Zulu as they are African. The difference between the Hausas and Zulus and the Arabs is that the latter extend to the lands east of the Red Sea that conventionally, or through what Mazrui calls *European mapmaking*, are not regarded as part of the African continent. But if the Red Sea is a geographical crack, as Ibrahim contends, or a Eurocentric geopolitical construct, as Mazrui maintains, of no consequence for the people straddling these lands, then the very notion of distinctive African and Arab identities should be dispensed with.

This is, of course, easier said than done. In fact, it turned out that our conversation thus far was a prelude to the recurrent theme of slavery and the Zanzibar revolution of 1964 and the genocide of the Arabs on the island and its tragic legacies. The issue of slavery was broached in two interrelated ways: the role of Arabs in the East African slave trade and the extent of African slavery in Oman. He gave a nuanced but overly defensive analysis. Ibrahim's condemnation of slavery was unequivocal, but he sought to qualify the role of Arabs and slavery in Oman in ways that were both predictable and refreshing. He correctly pointed out that the scale of the so-called Arab slave trade in the Indian Ocean world has been grossly exaggerated. He repeated Mazrui's famous line in *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*: "Where are those slaves?" They seem to have done a disappearing

act, for their descendants are nowhere to be seen in the Arab world in numbers that remotely resemble those of African descendants in the Americas.

His long, if convoluted, discourse on slavery echoed familiar arguments that every society has practiced slavery, including African societies; the Arabs didn't discriminate who they enslaved, for they enslaved fellow Arabs, Africans, and Europeans; Islam ameliorated the conditions of slavery quite considerably. Coming to East Africa specifically, Ibrahim launched into a vigorous attack against the notorious portrayals of Tippu Tip as the region's biggest slave trader in the nineteenth century, and of Umaliza another so-called Arab slave trader. He asked me if I had read Tippu Tip's autobiography. No, I replied, although as every school child of my generation was taught Tippu Tip was the most vicious slave trader the region had ever seen. Well, Ibrahim smiled ruefully, Tippu Tip doesn't mention slaves in his memoir. He hired porters to carry trade goods between the interior and the coast. His alleged cruelty is derived from one incident in which he had some porters who had lost his goods shot as punishment. As for Umaliza, he was in fact an African. His Arabness came from the fact that, like Ibrahim, his ancestral grandfather was Arab. This same Umaliza fought with the Wahehe against the Germans.

None of these qualifications disprove the fact that some Arab merchants were engaged in the slave trade or that slavery was practiced in Zanzibar itself. Ibrahim was more compelling in making the case that the scale of the slave trade and slavery systems controlled by the Arabs has been blatantly exaggerated since the nineteenth century by European missionaries and scholars who were intent on spreading Christianity among Africans and justifying European colonization. I have always been suspicious of the demographic comparisons of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades. As I pointed out in my book, *A Modern Economic History of Africa*, the so-called Arab slave trade is used by Eurocentric historians to absolve the European-controlled Atlantic slave trade for its unprecedented size and scale as the largest forced migration in history for the world's largest coercive production systems that gave birth to industrial capitalism and severely underdeveloped Africa.

Ibrahim shared with me an e-mail exchange with an American scholar who had written that by 1830, Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Zanzibar, was "the largest slave-trader in the world." Ibrahim replied to this scholar and quoted at length from a British historian of Zanzibar who discussed Said's commitment to abolish the slave trade. The hapless American wrote back apologizing that her expertise was Maine history, not East African history and that the article in which she inserted the quote "was written for local citizens from the perspective of local history." Ibrahim didn't let her off so easily. "In these days of instant everything," he admonished her, "the whole world reads you when you post something on the net."

In our conversation, he repeated two pivotal points that he made to the American scholar. First, the Arabs in Arabia, including Oman, had very little need for slaves because they possessed no agricultural or manufacturing industry for which they needed large supplies of labor. Indeed, they didn't even have enough food to feed themselves, and instead of trying to bring people to the desert they were busy themselves trying to emigrate to East Africa and the Far East as far as Indonesia. The only people who could afford slaves were the sheikhs, and few of them did, but they acquired their slaves from other Arab "tribes," or from Europe and some from Africa. There was no large-scale Arab slave trade directed at black Africans in the manner of the Atlantic slave trade. He gave the

example of a Georgian slave whose daughter, Saida Salime, became a prominent princess and wrote about her mother's experiences which were similar to the experiences of African women slaves. Female slaves' children with the sheikhs were not slaves and they themselves became manumitted. Several of these offspring rose to prominent positions in society and even became rulers and queens.

In this sense, slavery in Arab societies resembled slavery in African societies in that slaves were often integrated into kinship structures and not reproduced inter-generationally. The Arabs did not harbor the color prejudices of the Europeans and the intermarriages and intermingling that took place resulted in the people of Zanzibar being called Arab because of their paternal ancestry and were often indistinguishable from the other Africans. Ibrahim brought me a book and showed me the picture of a black man who he said was from Harlem in 1904. Who is this, he asked while hiding the caption identifying him. I wracked my brains but couldn't come up with an answer. Read here, he removed his hand. It was the Sultan of Zanzibar, supposedly an Arab, who was deposed by the British because of his progressive modernization and anti-colonial policies. Then he told the story of going to a school in Mombasa and asking students of different ethnic groups to identify themselves. He selected an "Arab" student whose ancestors came from out of Africa. The Kikuyu and Kamba students were lighter in complexion than the darker-skinned "Arab" student called Mazrui, a young cousin of our mutual friend Alamin Mazrui. From that day the "Arab" student said he felt empowered as a local.

The young Mazrui was relieved because the term *Arab* is used not only to demote a foreigner in East Africa, but a despicable foreigner who doesn't belong and should be gotten rid of. This is because Arabs and Muslims have been painted as ruthless slave traders since colonial times. This missionary and colonial propaganda is repeated and reproduced in school textbooks and the popular media. Even intellectuals have drunk and they spew this poison. He gave two examples. One, Tom Mbotela's book published in the 1930s, *Uhuru wa Watumwa*, which offers a missionary-influenced anti-Arab and anti-Muslim invective. The book keeps getting reprinted by the East African Publishing House and is a popular school text. The other is the poetry of a prominent Tanzanian writer whose name I didn't catch. Ibrahim read me one of the writer's poems that he analyzes in one of his books. The poetry is dripping with hatred for Arabs. The tragedy is that such poetry is not seen for what it is: racist drivel that would not be tolerated if it were targeted at other communities.

The propaganda on Arab slavery directly led to the genocide of up to 12,000 Arabs in Zanzibar in the revolution of January 1964. This heinous crime is celebrated every year and foreign governments send representatives to the celebrations. Anti-Arab diatribes are essential to justify the genocide of 1964 and other atrocities committed against Arabs in Zanzibar in 1972. History, as always, is distorted to demonize the enemy of the nation, in this case, the Arabs. Ibrahim's bitterness was palpable. He took me upstairs to the TV room and showed me a video on African decolonization and events in East Africa in the early and mid-1960s from the Mondo Cane Collection. It included two minutes of horrific images I had not seen before taken from the air by a plane trying to rescue foreign journalists whose plane had landed amidst the mayhem. The plane is shot at by the revolutionaries so it does not land. The pictures are horrific, their eerie poignancy enhanced by their very distance and lack of close-ups. You see ghosts of faceless people in white clothes running desperately into the calm sea followed by others in shorts, presumably the killers, only to see a moment later those in the white kanzus frozen on the ground as those in shorts run back to the dry land. Similarly, you see mass graves empty one moment and

filled the next, as well as trucks bursting with bodies—it reminded me of Rwanda. I was ashamed I didn't know much about the genocide. Some people were shot; many others were chopped by machetes. Ibrahim lost an aunt. They were even denied the consolation of burying her finger. The victims were forced to dig their own graves, while the survivors cowered in silence and guilt for the alleged crimes of their Arab ancestors and their very Arabness. Many fled to Oman.

I was exposed to an unfamiliar side of President Nyerere. Ibrahim called him a racist and one of Africa's worst leaders. He accused Nyerere of having planned the revolution from beginning to end, assisted by the British and the churches. As a Catholic, Nyerere hated Muslims and as a nationalist he hated Arabs. The British were complicit because they refused to provide any assistance or protection to the unarmed citizens of the island they ruled for many decades. The churches are the ones who poisoned the local people from the mainland, who perpetrated the genocide in misguided vengeance against the Muslim Arab slave traders.

He went into detail about the roles of Nyerere and some of his lieutenants, such as Oscar Kambona, Karume, and Babu. He brought me several books and encouraged me to buy and read *Mwembechai Killings* by Hamza Mustafa Njozi, *Darkside of Nyerere's Legacy* by Ludovick Muriage, *The Partnership* by Aboud Jumbe, and *Life and Times of Oba Sykes* by Muhammad Said. He revealed that he has edited a book that will soon be coming out based on firsthand accounts of some of the perpetrators of the violence and killings. It made his stomach churn with horror and disgust, he lamented. Many of them were brought from the mainland, but locals finished the job. On the day of the revolution, police armories were broken into and armaments given to the local people. The divisive nationalist slogans at the time were *Kenya for Kenyans*, *Tanzanians for Tanganyikans* and *Zanzibar for Africans*. For Africans, not Zanzibaris, he hissed.

This is why we have to combat the lies about the Arab slave trade. These lies directly led to the genocide in Zanzibar, he stressed, and continue to poison Afro-Arab relations, to undermine Arabian and East African relations, regions whose histories are so intertwined.

I asked him whether it makes sense to talk of an African diaspora in the Gulf at all. He thought for a moment and said it doesn't make sense to talk of an African diaspora as such; one could perhaps talk of a Zanzibari diaspora since the revolution and expulsions. He gave two main reasons from Oman's vantage point. First, given Oman's long history of engagement with East Africa, the historical memory of Omani identity incorporates peoples along the East African coastal Omani settlements. Secondly, peoples from Africa, even those who came as slaves, are fully integrated because of Islamic precepts about equality and slavery which encouraged tribal incorporation and manumission; the Arabs' principles of inheritance in which children of the father, regardless of the status of the mother, are entitled to equal inheritance according to gender (boys twice as much as girls); and the lack of color prejudice made intermarriages, not just concubinage, quite common. He noted that social prejudices are more tied to status than color, and was quick to add that while the inheritance of males and females may appear unequal on the surface, in reality it is not so, for what the woman inherits is hers alone while the man shares his with his family.

The situation in Oman is quite different than in the U.S., for example, where race and color reign supreme. African Americans, he observed, have been abused mentally, so uprooted from their continent and culture that they were left with color as their chief defining characteristic. The multiplicity of identities that are quite common elsewhere are short-circuited and singularized into color and race. He thinks of himself, for example, as a Mswahili, Zanzibari, African, Arab, and Muslim. The danger of what happened in

Zanzibar is precisely from efforts to racialize and compartmentalize people, to deny people their multiple identities. Before the revolution he thought of himself as an *Mswahili*, an identity that simultaneously embraced his Arab ancestry and affirmed his Africanness. One of the painful things that happened was to see a friend he had grown up with, called Abbas, with whom he shared everything from language to culture, turn against him as an "Arab."

As we drove around the city and to the countryside, he took every opportunity to buttress his arguments. We first drove to his niece's house, a tall, attractive and very light-skinned, middle-aged woman. She welcomed us eagerly. She instructed her daughter to give us some drinks but we declined, saying we had just eaten. Do you know who this woman is, Ibrahim asked me mischievously. I stared blankly at him. She couldn't contain her laughter. It's Aboud's mother, he said triumphantly. Of course, Aboud had told me his mother lived here and he had told me her varied background—African, Indian, Arab, and European. I shook her hand again, and told her what a wonderful time I had with her son in Bangalore. He told me, she said. We are very close, we talk all the time and like to tease each other, she continued excitedly. This is his half-sister, she explained. After we left, Ibrahim turned to me. You see, how can Aboud Jumbe turn against his own mother; she is even lighter than a lot of Arabs here. Color shouldn't matter. She is a Zanzibari. Even the royal family has some dark-skinned people. The Sultan's uncle was a very dark man, he pointed out, and talked about the crown prince in Kuwait, quite a dark man with African ancestry.

We drove to Sumail about 120 kilometers away from Muscat. The road, two lanes each way, snaked through the naked mountains whose beauty unfolded only gradually to someone used to vegetation. The haze enveloping the mountains in the distance gave them a majestic silhouette of a great painting. Ibrahim drives around a lot taking pictures. Before we left his house he showed me an album of photographs that turned brown, bare surfaces that he reframed into fine works of art. Occasionally, the unforgiving landscape would be broken by isolated patches of green palm trees, behind which there would be a house or two or more. Each time we saw one of these oases, he would joke ironically, this is why Oman needed a lot of slaves from Africa. The grim landscape offered a compelling ecological argument against large-scale imports of slave labor. In fact, the opposite: Oman, which then included what is today the UAE, had to export its peoples to the greener pastures of East Africa and as far as East Asia. In these scattered oases the tough, rugged farmers of Oman used every watered piece of soil to grow dates, lemons, and sometimes mangoes.

This is a very backward country, he stressed, far behind Zanzibar, which to generations of Omanis has represented cosmopolitan development. The entire infrastructure you see, including all these roads, were built very recently. Thirty years ago it would take people days on foot or donkey to make the journey from Muscat to Sumail, which now takes only 90 minutes or less. He attributed this spectacular development and transformation to His Majesty's vision, as he referred to the Sultan. He has fulfilled the promises he made to his people when he took power. He has used the petrodollars wisely, he enthused. He commended the royal family for their relative frugality, humility, and courteousness. They apparently live in ordinary homes and none of the country's billionaires are from the ruling family or tribe. In fact, some of the richest people in Oman are not Arabs, but Indians. This is quite different from the situation in Saudi Arabia where the large royal family monopolizes wealth. The ministers here do not even have body guards, he marveled. The contrast with Zanzibar is truly sad, he shook his head. Here is a country which was so far ahead, but mortgaged its future and gave up some of its most trained people to

other countries including Oman, all in the name of a misguided, racially polarizing revolution. He frowned with contempt when talking about Karume who became the leader of Zanzibar. So venal was his corruption that when his son came to the U.S. to study at Columbia, he declared at immigration that he was carrying a \$1 million check. The immigration officials called the Tanzanian embassy who advised them to leave him alone as he was the son of an important man. Ibrahim was then in New Jersey.

When it was time for him to leave the U.S., Ibrahim opted for Oman instead of Tanzania, his homeland. He has been here for the past ten years, part of the new Swahili diaspora in Oman, the land of some of his ancestors. He and his fellow Zanzibari immigrants represent one strand of the African diaspora in Oman, simultaneously part of the new diasporas and part of the old networks of engagement between Oman and East Africa.

What I need to know more about are the perspectives of the other new diasporas—migrants from other parts of Africa, and the old networks of engagements—the African-descended people who have been here for generations whether they came here as enslaved or free peoples. But for one day, this has been truly incredible.

July 8, 2009

Ibrahim was supposed to pick me up and meet one of his friends, a prominent Zanzibari, around 10:00 a.m. The meeting was delayed by an hour. The more I am driven around the city the more I find it interesting with its wide roads, gleaming white buildings and immaculate houses. There is none of the grandiosity of Dubai or even Doha. Instead, Muscat has a clean, subdued charm that, in the end, is aesthetically more satisfying. But like the other cities, there is a lot of construction going on. We drove past a new gated community by the sea, which was under construction, called “The Wave” which promises cosmopolitan luxury, Muscat style. The road to the sea is quickly filling up with buildings, mostly sumptuous houses. Ibrahim explained that there used to be few isolated houses in this part of the city just a few years back.

One of the few people who had houses in this area was the man we were going to visit. His house used to look like a mansion then, now it is quite ordinary, Ibrahim said. But it did not look ordinary to me. The metal gate opens to a lush garden of flowers and plants and a stylish multi-story house. As we entered through the large carved door I was struck by how everything spoke of fine taste and posh living—the marble floors, plush furniture, lavish carpets, and paintings imaginatively adorned around the walls. Even the cool, air-conditioned air was perfumed with burning incense.

Mr. Ali Mahruqy radiated charm and warmth the moment he welcomed us into his magnificent home. Like Ibrahim, he was wearing a white thawb and a cap. He has a deep, pleasant voice and smiles easily. He led us to one of the living rooms. A servant brought us drinks. Like Ibrahim’s servant, he was Asian, probably Indian, while the servant at Ibrahim’s looked Filipino. Ali indicated that he had heard good things about the research I am doing from Ibrahim, who he referred to as *professor*. The work I am doing is indeed important for humanity, he said gravely. It is critical to set the record straight, to remove misunderstandings among people, to build bridges. He quoted an appropriate verse from the Qur’an to emphasize his point, something he resorted to quite frequently. Like Ibrahim, it was clear that he is a man of deep faith.

I was struck by how much Ibrahim and I had bonded, for him to have enough confidence to introduce me to some of his closest friends. As the saying goes, what a difference a day makes. When I first met him, I recalled his warning that I should not be like Henry Louis Gates and impose African-American perspectives on Omani society, or like those scholars who would rather take the perspective of laymen on the street rather than scholars and other informed people like him who have thought about issues of identity quite seriously.

It soon became clear that Mahruqy wanted to focus primarily on the issue of slavery after I had explained to him the scope of my project. He began by arguing that slavery has ecological and economic aspects, and on both grounds Oman could not sustain it as an important part of society. The desert environment cannot support large-scale agriculture for which slave labor might be needed. There was clearly no need for slaves here, as they would be nothing but a burden to the people here who were largely poor and eked by on a subsistence living. When slaves were acquired by the sheikhs, Africans were not specifically targeted, for such slaves could be Arab or European as well. The slaves were important members of the family and fully integrated into society. He repeated Ibrahim's point that slave women who gave birth to a master's child became free and their children were free. In Oman, descendants of African slaves in the royal family occupy important positions. For example, one is commander of the army and another is commander of the National Guard. In looking at the economics of slavery in Oman, it is also pertinent to consider the capacity Oman had to bring the kind of numbers of slaves that some people carelessly talk about. At the height of its power, the Oman fleet did not have more than 100 dhows, which could only carry a few people at a time. We are not talking about the large slave ships that sailed the Atlantic here, he grinned.

It is high time for African scholars to write their own histories of relations with Arabia rather than follow distortions produced by European scholars, Mahruqy remarked. The latter are interested in making the Arabs look bad so that they look good, when in fact Europeans are responsible for much of the external damage inflicted on African societies over the last few centuries. He is pleased, he said, to see I am interested in finding out the truth. Africa now has lots of professors who are doing good work and are capable of rewriting the history of Afro-Arab relations. Oman has developed exchange programs with Nigeria and there are several Nigerian professors at the university here. Ibrahim mentioned several, some who are in medicine and the sciences.

At that point, we were interrupted for lunch. The dining room was in a sunken room facing the other living room close to the entrance. It was a light lunch of salad, fish, and dessert, including dates. Ali showed me how to eat the dates and Ibrahim repeated a poem about dates he recited to me yesterday. There are dozens of different types of dates, but the main ones are either yellow or dark. The poet celebrates the sweetness of the two dates but says his heart leans on the dark date. The poem is often read as signaling his preference for his dark, African wife. We laughed.

Ali used this to explain the difference between Arabs and Indians. Arabs are an assimilative people, he contended, unlike Hindus who are divided into rigid, racist castes in which Brahmins are on top, followed by various castes for specific occupations and the untouchables at the bottom. Christianity has, of course, been married to European racism. In Islam, neither caste nor race are the basis of difference, but levels of piety. In any case, wherever Arabs went, he claimed, as in East Africa or East Asia they lost their languages and intermarried with local people. They did not have a caste

system as did the Hindus or a concept of half-caste (mixed race) among the Europeans. This is crucial to understand. People who come from societies with strong color prejudices have great difficulties in understanding this. His own grandmother was a Manyema in Tanzania. He was born in Sukumaland and grew up there before proceeding for further education abroad.

It is terribly unfortunate, he said sadly, that Arabs in East Africa are seen as nothing but slave traders. Every society has had slavery, including African societies, so singling out the Arabs in Africa is unfair and dangerous. In fact, ruthless chiefs from the interior in East Africa captured people and took them to the coast to be sold. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Arabs hardly ventured into the interior. I showed him the pictures of the genocide in Zanzibar produced by this propaganda, Ibrahim interjected.

I am an Arab and an African, Mahruqy stressed. In the background, beautiful African and Congolese music was playing. I commended him for his choice. That's the music I grew up with, he chuckled. Omanis are closest to the Africans, not Indians or Europeans, he resumed. Before the continent split, Africa and the Gulf were part of the same land mass. More crucially, the peoples of the two regions are culturally related. Semitic languages, of which Arabic is one together with the four other languages spoken in Oman, originated in Ethiopia. People have been traveling back and forth between the Gulf and East Africa for centuries. He talked of a doctor from Kuwait who traveled across the East African coast from Ethiopia to Mozambique and encountered one community which was neither Muslim nor Christian, but its rituals were a combination of both. The people said their ancestors came from a village or town in Saudi Arabia, which he found actually existed when he visited Saudi Arabia.

He repeated Ibrahim's explanation about Omani migrations to East Africa and the contention that South Arabians have been in the region longer than the Bantus. Arabs migrated to East Africa fleeing tribal wars, drought, and poverty. East Africa was a land of refuge. Today the Bantus are, of course, the majority and that will not change, but they shouldn't keep other people out. Omani migrations to East Africa, including Ethiopia, began long before the rise of Islam. When people here think of Africa, they are really talking about East Africa. They don't identify with Egypt for example. East Africa and Oman should be celebrating not condemning the cultural richness that grew out of the mixtures of the peoples and societies and the exposure to one another in the two regions. This is why attempts to break this relationship are so unfortunate. The genocide in Zanzibar was a terrible tragedy that left behind a disastrous legacy. East Africa lost a lot of talented people who were committed to their countries' development. They both mentioned several prominent professionals, artists, and business people. One was a Zanzibari Iranian who became the chief artist of the Shah. Yesterday, Ibrahim maintained that the Shirazis of East Africa are in fact descended from Arabs who settled in Shiraz in Iran.

Linkages between Oman and East Africa continue, but they could be strengthened. Many people have relatives both in Oman and East Africa whom they visit or communicate with frequently. Large amounts of remittances are also sent by individuals to their relatives. There is a big interest in investing in East Africa among Oman and the other Gulf states, but this is held back because of concerns about the security of investments.

Mahruqy would have loved for us to talk longer but he had to rush for an appointment, he apologized. He is a former banker and Auditor-General of Oman. Currently, he is a member of the Consultative Commission of the Supreme Council for the Cooperation

Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. He said he looked forward to meeting me again and reading some of my work. Ibrahim was ecstatic. You see, he beamed when we were back in the car, he is a well-read man as I told you, but also very warm and humble. I nodded in agreement.

We agreed that Ibrahim would drop me off and pick me up a few hours later to show me more of the city. He returned in the early evening. The heat and humidity were as oppressive as ever. How people ended up in these harsh environments and survived before modern technology, and here I am thinking of the world's hottest and coldest places, is a tribute to human endurance. But one can't help thinking that people of the savanna temperate zones, like much of Malawi, lived in an ecological utopia.

I find that in most interviews and conversations, the first is always the most productive, subsequent ones provide little more than elaborations and, for bad story tellers, boring repetitions. Fortunately, Ibrahim is a great story teller. He is smart, funny, irreverent and passionate. The more time I spend with him the more I like him and respect his incisive mind and moral fervor, even if I don't agree with everything he says. Our conversations ran the gamut, but the genocide in Zanzibar reared its ugly head every so often. I asked him at one point what the solution was, whether a truth and reconciliation commission would help. There could be no reconciliation, he said, but he didn't sound too sure. Then what can be done, I persisted. It's important for people like you to tell the truth, he reflected, because whatever I say they will dismiss it because I am seen as an Arab. But can the solution, the burden of this ugly history, of the genocide be deflected to well-meaning outsiders? And how does such scholarly knowledge produced by outsiders get translated into school texts and local discourses? But he has a point—people like me are not outsiders when it comes to the larger question of Afro-Arab relations. We are all implicated as Africans and Arabs in so far as Africa is the homeland of Arabs as much as Arabia is the homeland of Africans.

He elaborated on Nyerere's anti-Arabism and anti-Islamism. In the late 1950s there were 40 scholarships secured by Zanzibar, which could be used for any student selected from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda to study in Egypt. Nyerere and Kenyatta refused the scholarships. The majority who got the scholarships were Africans and Indians as people were designated at the time, not Arabs. One black Tanzanian woman who had accepted the scholarship was forced to withdraw from Egypt. Today she works as a maid. Those who completed their studies are now prominent doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Such was Nyerere's hatred of Arabs and Muslims that an initiative for education for Zanzibaris in Nasser's Egypt had to be quashed, he said vehemently.

The idea that all Arabs are wealthy exploiters in Zanzibar is absurd. His grandfather sold milk and his father sold charcoal and he would come home coughing and covered in soot. The Arabs did not monopolize land on the island, which was available to anyone wishing to grow seasonal crops. Only permanent crops were prohibited on privately owned land. But people didn't see how much they had in common with their fellow Zanzibaris of Arab origin because they had drunk from the well of hatred thanks to the machinations of the missionaries.

Occasionally the conversation would lighten up, especially when we talked about people we know in common. He is very fond of Ali Mazrui, whose creative and sometimes provocative use of language he relishes, although his verbal pairings and antics can be too clever by half sometimes. He reprised two hilarious stories. At a conference in a paper on the spread of HIV/AIDS, Mazrui noted that the pandemic spread faster in non-Muslim

than in Muslim Africa because the former had partner unspecific polygamy. At another conference he challenged an American Jewish scholar who called Idi Amin a racist murderer. Amin was both a racist and a murderer, yes, but he did not murder the people he was racist against—the Asians—rather he murdered his own fellow black Ugandans, so he wasn't a racist murderer.

We drove to old Muscat, where the official palace and several museums and government buildings are located. Overlooking the bay is a fort where battles raged many centuries ago between the Omanis and the Portuguese for control over East African trade. The city has been extensively renovated, he observed. Even the façade in front of the palace is new. The roads, however, remain narrow, evoking an era before motor vehicles. From Muscat we drove to one of the grand hotels of the Gulf, which in fact was once rated as one of the Top 10 hotels in the world—Al Bustan. Certainly, the foyer with its gigantic glittering chandelier hanging from a massive dome is one of the grandest I have ever seen. Superstars and royalty love to stay here, not poor professors, he joked. The floors and stairways were all made of the finest marble. Ibrahim proudly took me around this remarkable monument of opulence. Then, as if in an act of repentance for this homage, he subsequently took me to a cheap Pakistani restaurant. As he said, the food outshone its drab surroundings. The roasted chicken, beans, salad, and breads of nan and chapatti were delicious indeed. The Pakistani men sitting by themselves or in groups of two or three ate mostly in lonely silence, migrant workers on whose alienated shoulders Oman's rapid economic growth and transformation rests. By the time we drove back it was dark outside except for the street lights. But the heat refused to retreat into the night.

July 9, 2009

Ibrahim came to pick me up after breakfast for a trip out of town, to Rustaq nearly 170 kilometers away. We have clearly become fond of each other and our conversation flowed freely from the serious to the mundane, the philosophical to the personal. He is a deeply humane person who passionately believes in justice and mutual respect among people of different races, religions, cultures, and traditions. This has been my most sustained engagement with a scholar who is also a devout Muslim. He is extremely erudite and no subject is off limits for him.

Many times we revisited issues we had previously discussed with the legacies of the Zanzibar revolution always lurking in the background and occasionally resurfacing. I learned that Nasser's 40 scholarships to the Zanzibar National Party that Nyerere and Kenyatta turned down inspired the Kenyan airlift program designed by Mboya and the Americans, which took Barack Obama Senior to study in the U.S. So without Zanzibar, he quipped, there would not have been a Barack Obama Junior! I learned of his many activities including the philanthropic assistance he provides by himself or together with his wife to relatives here and in Zanzibar and others in need. He explained his actions are guided by the humanistic principles he derives from Islam. All along, as we drove he would occasionally be interrupted by the phone ringing. Almost invariably it would be his friends, or colleagues, or family, and they would be speaking in Kiswahili. I have heard so much Kiswahili here that it is easy to forget sometimes that I am not in East Africa.

Language is one of the identifying markers of the East African contemporary diaspora in Oman. This distinguishes them from both the non-immigrant Omanis and Omanis of African slave ancestry. The foundation of this identity has taken place in the context of the construction of a new Omani national identity under the political and modernization project of Sultan Qaboos who seized power in 1970. The East Africans are a heterogeneous group, but Swahili has given them a collective identity that affirms both their distinctiveness and integration into Omani society, an identity that transcends the old genealogies and regions of their ancestry, real or putative, and positions them to mobilize a presence at the national level. The heterogeneity of the East Africans reflects their varied identities in East Africa, itself forged out of different waves of migration from Oman to East Africa, from Zanzibar to Congo; with various class positions and social interactions in society, and patterns of intermarriage and the shifting constructions of Arabness in which British and German colonial constructions of "Africans", "Indian" and "Arabs" played a crucial role.

At Barka we left the main tree-lined road that Ibrahim said went all the way to Dubai. We branched into a road leading to Rustaq, along which lay a terrain of fried rocky soil occasionally broken by small and isolated settlements of villages and houses, some of which were under various stages of construction. Then we entered the majestic mountains enveloped by mist that grew more spectacular as the road wound its way around them. At Wadi Ban Awf we left the main road into the valley nestled among the mountains where small villages emerged around any oasis of water, their size determined by the amount of water available. Several times we stopped and stepped out of the car to take pictures of the awesome mountains with rock formations that gave them the appearance of giant stone sculptures created by a master artist. In the old days it would take weeks from here to Muscat, Ibrahim said, restating the theme of Oman's rapid economic development in recent decades. People needed to take food to last them for the journey and they had to negotiate their way among communities burrowed along the hills. Now, the villagers have cars, and many have succumbed to the lure of the cities despite government efforts to bring to the villages the conveniences of urban life, from piped water to electricity.

Rustaq was once the capital of Oman. Before entering the town we stopped by an old crumbling fort built by the Mazruis. You can tell Alamin Mazrui and Professor Ali Mazrui that you have been to their ancestral home, Ibrahim said. We took several pictures. The town has undergone transformation and few of the old mud houses survive, although the narrow roads remind one of the old patterns of intimate urbanization. In several places we were caught in traffic with cars parked on the roadside and others trying to pass and negotiate the bends adjacent to the houses. It appeared there was a wedding. In the past, Ibrahim explained, weddings provided one of the few opportunities for some people to eat properly. There was so much hunger, some would not even wash their hands for days afterward to smell the fading aroma of the food. How things have changed, he sighed. That's why so many wanted to escape to greener pastures in East Africa or East Asia, he said, coming back to our earlier conversation.

We drove around the town with its groves of palm trees, lemons, bananas, and gardens of maize and vegetables. We saw the castle and the main street with modern shops. We would have stayed longer but on the way there Ibrahim had received a phone call from his wife that the father of one of his neighbors had passed and the funeral was later this afternoon.

Before dropping me off at the hotel, we stopped by a Lebanese restaurant for lunch. After his meal he left me to pray at a nearby mosque. I chatted with one of the waiters,

a lanky man from Syria who has been in Oman for a little over a year but is already anxious to return home, for he misses his family.

As agreed, a couple of hours or so after I had been left at the hotel, Ibrahim came to pick me up for the pre-arranged dinner at his house. Mahruqy was there and I was very pleased to see him again, and so was he. It was a sumptuous meal—chicken, fish, lamb, vegetables, rice, cassava cooked in coconut, and several breads, including *mandazi*. We were joined by Ibrahim's older son who avoided the fish. Young people don't seem to like fish and the old traditional foods, Mahruqy joked. After they were done eating they left me to pray in the living room in front of the dining room. I felt a little awkward as I watched them saying their prayers and prostrating together with Ibrahim's younger son I had met earlier. The two boys donned thawbs that were not white like the two older men's. Mahruqy led the prayers.

After the prayers we retired to the living room for bounteous desserts of fruits and cakes. I was feeling quite bloated, especially given that we had eaten a late lunch. The conversation was just as wide-ranging and delicious. While they were praying, Mahruqy had left me with a paper he had written on Oman and East Africa and the need to build a new relationship. It was a fascinating, insightful paper which called for honest, serious and systematic studies of historical relations between the two regions, including the subject of slavery and the dynamics and legacies of the Zanzibar revolution. Beyond that, there is need to establish mechanisms of cooperation to strengthen current and future relations based on a clear appreciation that whatever the nature of the past, in the future, Oman, the Gulf more generally, and East Africa would continue needing each other. Oman certainly needs to think of a post-oil future and East Africa needs lots of foreign investment that the Gulf can provide. While Africa is building strong relations with China and India, the Gulf is not only closer but has long-standing relations with East Africa, which should be taken advantage of. Mazrui's idea of Afrabia ought to be taken seriously and used as a basis of Afro-Arab relations in general and Gulf-East African relations in particular.

The East African diaspora in Oman and the Gulf in general is a natural bridge between the two regions. But it is not possible to move forward unless the issues of slavery and the Zanzibari genocide that killed 17,000 Arabs are dealt with honestly. Clearly, terrible crimes have been committed on both sides. Arab slavery, despite the exaggerations of European colonialists and Christian missionaries, left bitter feelings among Africans which fomented the Zanzibar genocide, which, in turn, has left bitter feelings among Arabs. Setting the historical record straight is essential. But it raises large moral questions that we need to grapple with as human beings, the need for forgiveness and reconciliation based on truth and tolerance. This raises difficult questions about reparations. In so far as slavery involved Africans themselves, who would pay reparations to whom? I mentioned similar questions that have been raised in the Atlantic world concerning the deserving victims and those who should pay. As Abdul Sheirff asked in a debate on a similar subject, should the whole American or British nation pay, including the black victims of slavery? And who should be paid, the descendants of the slaves themselves or the modern ruling classes of Africa whose foreparents participated in the slave trade and the present ruthless exploitation of their own societies?

We also talked at length about the roles of the diaspora and development and his fervent belief that the African diaspora will increasingly become recognized by African governments as an engine of economic development much as India has done. Mahruqy also discussed the insufferable myopia of western leaders and media when it comes to the Arab and Muslim worlds. He meets many top American officials and he is often shocked by their intellectual ignorance, their lack of understanding of the complexities of these societies.

At the beginning of the Iraq war he warned an American general that they would be met with stiff resistance. The latter scoffed at him. A few years later he called to apologize. But he is one of the few honest ones. Several times he has written to officials and people he has met seeking honest dialogue and some don't even respond. Mahruqy refuses to visit the United States now, he said with a tinge of sadness. Maybe they will change under Obama, he added, his speech in Cairo was a good beginning, but only a beginning.

Inevitably the Palestinian-Israeli conflict came up. Mahruqy argued that most people would like to see this conflict resolved, but Israel, which is backed by the West and especially the U.S., doesn't want real peace in the region by withdrawing from the occupied territories as proposed by the Arab League in 2002 as a basis of Arab recognition. The Israelis keep repeating the tired canard that the Arabs are intent on the destruction of Israel, a charge they have now extended to Iran's Ahmadinejad. It is patently unjust that the indigenous Palestinians are aliens in their homeland while Jews, many with multiple nationalities, are automatically welcomed as full citizens of Israel and are allowed to build in the occupied territories. The injustice of this is evident to any clear thinking person and balanced Jewish thinkers have been pointing out the inequities and dangers bred by the Israeli government and zealous Zionists. There is absolutely no moral or legal basis to justify the victimization of one people in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of another.

This is the supreme irony of Israel, Mahruqy continued, a country established by and for people who suffered from the horrendous tragedy of the Holocaust, but who are now inflicting untold suffering on the Palestinians who had nothing to do with Jewish suffering in Europe. Jews should be in the forefront of championing the cause of oppressed people in the world. In fact, it is well to remember that Jews lived peacefully among Muslims for centuries around the Arab and Muslim worlds, including Andalusian Spain. Remarkably, after the *Reconquista*, Jews and Muslims in Spain were forced to convert to Christianity or were expelled. Christian Europe, not Muslim Arabs, persecuted the Jews. The U.S. enables Israeli intransigence. Western support for Israel is facilitated by ignorance of the history of Palestine among the public, especially in the U.S.; western guilt over the Holocaust and previous persecution of Jews; and the effective lobbying of groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which have prevented American officials from taking measures which might be remotely critical of Israel even if such policies are in the best interests of the United States. Underlying this is the demonization of Islam and Arabs, which escalated following 9/11. Ironically, while the western media and politicians rail against Islamic fundamentalism, the Christian fundamentalist groups exert considerable influence on their governments and lend their support to extremist policies against Muslim-dominated states, especially in the Arab world. But a just solution has to be found if the region is to stop going through cycles of war and violence. Only justice will bring peace and security to all peoples of the region, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, and non-Arabs.

The conversation moved to the power of faith and the religious tolerance of Islam. The subtext was quite clear, although they repeated several times that Islam is not a proselytizing religion, doesn't believe in conversions. When I was ready to return to the hotel, I had been fed a fulsome of delicious food and intriguing ideas. I was ready to call it a day. Ibrahim asked his eldest son to drive me back. This gave me an opportunity to get a glimpse into the life of youth here. He is in his second year in college studying IT. He was surprised that I had something positive to say about Muscat. This place is boring, it is a desert and hot, he hissed. There is nothing much to do here, that's why my brother wants to study abroad. What music do the young people like here? I changed the subject.

Mostly hip hop, he replied, although many also like rock and some even like country. He informed me that my hotel was actually in a vicinity of where a lot of young people hang out. He swerved by there, where there is a cinema and several restaurants and coffee houses. There were cars everywhere. The boys come to stare at the girls, he sneered. He pointed to several groups of young men lounging by their expensive cars and SUVs, calling some of them *wannabees*. When some car blocked his way he cursed, these Omanis don't know how to drive. A minute later we were at the hotel. It would have been nice to talk to him more and find out the way the children of the East African diaspora think of themselves and how they fit into Omani society compared to their parents' generation and what memories, imaginations, and engagements of Africa they maintain.

July 10, 2009

This was largely a restful day until evening. In the late afternoon I decided, despite the weather, to take a long walk around the neighborhood. Eventually I ended up at the beach. Men were playing football or loitering about. I saw a black man sitting by a bench and I said hi. He didn't respond. Maybe he didn't hear me, I consoled myself for this lack of brotherly connection. The area surrounding the beach has some incredibly beautiful houses and apartments. As I walked back I saw a black man watering his lawn. Maybe he was Indian or Arab or African, it was hard to tell, but I didn't even try to say hello. Maybe they don't talk to strangers easily in this part of the world, no need for the street racial nods and acknowledgement one often encounters in American and European cities.

In the early evening, Yusuf Hamdoon Al-Harthy, Deputy Director for Media Services at Sultan Qaboos University, came to collect me. I got his contact from his brother Majid who is completing his PhD at Indiana University in Bloomington. Majid is writing on African musical influences in Oman. He did his research in Sur where he apparently became trusted enough for the African-descended community to confide in him some of their secret ritual practices, at least according to his brother Yusuf. Majid e-mailed me expressing regret that he could not take me around Muscat and Sur, since he was in Bloomington, but he hoped one of his brothers would. He called me from Indiana a couple of days ago when he received my e-mail. I was given his contact by Aisha in Dubai. He promised to send me a copy of his dissertation once it has been submitted.

I was excited at the prospect of meeting his brothers. I first called Ali whom I talked to and the next day I got in touch with Yusuf. Earlier today he called to say he and Ali would come. But he ended up coming alone as Ali had gone out with his African friends. Majid had told me that they were from Rwanda and his brothers spoke Kiswahili. One of his brothers is head of the municipality and another is head of the port authority. Yusuf came here at the age of seven, but his brothers were much older.

I had expected them to be black Rwandans. When I saw Yusuf in the lobby, I was a little taken aback: he is a light-skinned Arab. He is a tall, lanky, and friendly man. We greeted each other in Kiswahili. I realized how deep racial assumptions about African identity are, even for someone like me who is trying so hard to deracialize our notions of African diasporas. It also reflected my ignorance until now that the East African Arab or Swahili or Zanzibari—all three terms are used here—are not confined to communities from the islands and the coast but extend deep into the interior all the way to Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo.

Yusuf explained, as we drank coffee at a café frequented by a lot of Africans, that there were indeed a lot of migrants to Oman from the East African interior, distinct from those from the coast. But they all regard themselves as African Omanis and they tend to speak Swahili. In the past, Omani migrations to East Africa followed tribal and family patterns. For example, the Al-Kharusis and Riyamis tended to migrate to Zanzibar, while the Tokis, Esris, Barwanis, and Harithis went to Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo. The migrations to the East African coast were of course much older than those to the interior. There were also occupational and class differences. The coastal communities had a lot more families connected to ruling and commercial families in Oman than the interior communities.

Another difference concerned their respective colonial powers. The Africans from Kenya and Tanzania who have resettled in Oman since the 1960s have the advantage of English, whereas those from Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo learned French, which is not in demand in Oman so that they have to learn both Arabic and English. The African Omanis include those whose ancestors or parents were both originally from Oman or one parent, usually the mother, was from East Africa. African Omani identities are therefore complicated. Linguistically they are united by Swahili, but they display different levels of competence in Arabic and English. Ethnic identities—he used the term ‘tribal’—are important in Oman and the East Africans juggle between their different East African identities, collective African Omani identity, ethnic Omani identities, and national Omani identity.

The distinctions among the African Omanis and between them and other Omanis were much stronger in the past than they are now. African Omanis can be found in every sector of the economy and society. In fact, they dominate the technical and professional fields, including the banking and petroleum industries. The Zanzibaris are particularly highly regarded for their competence and reliability. One time Yusuf had a staff of 60 from different ethnic and social backgrounds, but the Zanzibaris were the ones he could really depend on.

The African Omanis are much freer in terms of clothing, attitudes toward men and women mixing, and dealing with people of diverse backgrounds. This is a source of problems for some of them, and still is. In order to show that they belong, some African Omani women started wearing black abayas, which are not even from Oman. In the interior, religious women wear more colorful clothing. But nobody really bothers you if you wear non-Muslim or non-Omani dress. Yusuf was wearing a white shirt and beige pants. Oman is a lot freer than Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait when it comes to Islamic dress. Overall, Omanis are also more welcoming of outsiders than in the Emirates, despite the latter’s openness to foreign capital and tourists. It is much easier to socialize with Omanis, they take you home. One time his brother, who is the head of the municipality, was in Dubai at a shop buying shoes and the Egyptian salesperson complained to him that although he has been in the country for many years he doesn’t have a single Emirati friend. Yusuf also claimed that unlike the Emirates, much of the investment here has been local so that the country was not as badly hit as the UAE, especially Dubai, when the recent economic crisis hit. Oman’s economic growth has been relatively slow, steady, and solid.

Many African Omanis returned from Rwanda following the 1994 genocide. He talked proudly and marveled at the enormous advances Rwanda has made since the genocide. The level of political reconciliation and economic growth registered has been quite breathtaking. He spoke adoringly of President Paul Kagame, his apparent commitment to the rule of law, reconciliation, education, investment, and development. His family still has their properties in Rwanda and one of his brothers still lives there. It is such a beautiful

country, Yusuf raved when I told him I have not yet been to Rwanda. In fact, one of his friends went to Rwanda and when he came back started cursing him, how could you leave such a beautiful country for this desert? There are a lot of movements back and forth between Oman and East Africa. Omani and other Gulf Rwandese have been making significant investments in Rwanda, especially after the government started giving stolen properties back and established clear investment rules.

African Omanis socialize together a lot and intermarry. Tonight his brother Ali has gone out with his African friends as they normally do on Fridays. They drive out of town and stop on the side of the road for drinking parties. They often talk about how Omani women are not as attractive and sexually enticing as Rwandese or Ethiopian women, Somali and other African women. Yusuf felt so comfortable with me that he went a little graphic to express his and his brothers' and friends' appreciation for African women's beauty and sexuality. Beauty is what you were brought up to admire, he concluded, and they grew up surrounded and admiring African women, those elegant, tall Rwandese women with their ample proportions. Talking of Somalia, he lamented the country's continuing tragedy, the endless conflicts, which he said, were further being stoked by misguided U.S. policies.

Yusuf received his college education in the U.S. When he first got there he was amazed at the ignorant questions he used to get. Everybody assumed they live in tents and ride camels. Yes we do, they would answer cheekily, and people put their Ferraris on top of the camel. It reminded me how we used to poke fun at similar questions from students in Canada or England. Yes, we live in trees, and Britain's ambassador was offered the tallest tree to live in. Yes, we walk naked, so when Prime Minister Trudeau visited he had to be stripped naked at the airport to be like the natives!

He said his brothers know a lot more of the changes African Omanis have gone through and their relations with Rwanda than he does because he came here at such an early age. The fact that he knows and speaks Swahili underscores the role of Kiswahili in maintaining an African diasporan identity. He talked briefly about Majid's research on Sur music. When you hear it, he enthused, you instantly feel the rhythms of Africa. It just sounds like Taarab and Malindi music in East Africa. He noted that there is vast literature on Oman-East African connections, some of the works are written by prominent figures in the Gulf. The ruler of Sharjah, for example, wrote a lot on Gulf-East African relations. On the way to our next stop, a restaurant, we passed a bookstore and he pointed to a huge volume that had just been published on the subject. Unfortunately, the bookstore was closed.

The café was filled with young people, most of whom were probably in their twenties. Some were on their computers as there is free Internet service. There was a large group of men and women. Two of the men and one of the women were unmistakably black and the others were various shades of lightness. I reproached myself for searching for a melanin quotient of African diaspora identity. They were probably all Africans, or perhaps not. Oman has provided compelling evidence of the inadequacy of blackness as the identifying marker of an African diasporic identity. On looks alone, I would not have guessed Yusuf's or Ali's or Ibrahim's African diaspora identities, which are as impeccable as my own. If India ruptures the automatic association between blackness and Africanness, Oman and the Gulf in general shatter the disassociation between lightness and Africanness, both problematic propositions that would not arise if our conception of Africa, from the outset, were de-raced and incorporates all the continent's peoples as unquestionably African. Such a simple definition of Africa itself should be the basis for framing African diasporas.

The restaurant he took me to was lovely. It was an open restaurant at the back of a shopping square. We could have been in Kigali, or Nairobi, or Johannesburg, or Cairo with the smoking water pipes. Yusuf ordered one. It's not tobacco, he explained, but leaves of fruit trees, they are soothing. I didn't feel like trying. As at the café, he brought up the subject of Michael Jackson again. He and his brothers met him when he was staying at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel. He stayed there for 45 days. Michael met with him for about an hour but they didn't take pictures because he was in his pajamas. But his brothers saw him again and took pictures. Yusuf thought Michael was a simple, kind, shy, but intensely lonely man. He was physically fit and his skin was not falling apart as the tabloids said. On the contrary, it was taut, not a wrinkle anywhere, but the color was unnatural, pallid, almost ghostly. That was in 2005.

Michael's bodyguard told them he liked it here because he was not mobbed by fans so he felt a lot freer. It struck them that he was a prisoner of his fame, a deeply unhappy, troubled man. He heard from Michael's dermatologist on TV recently following his death that he was in constant pain because of all the surgery done to his face. If it is true that all those pain medications he used to take finally killed him, then his facial transformation set him on a path to early death, Yusuf reflected. Vitiligo didn't have to lead him to change the morphology of his face, to transform himself into a white-looking man. His disease was not to cover vitiligo, but to erase his phenotype, to whiten himself in color and shape. It is in this sense, as I wrote on my blog, that he died from black self-hate. I didn't say this to Yusuf but he, too, could not fully understand why Michael ended up doing all those surgeries. People say his father used to tease him about his big nose, Yusuf noted. He should have stopped his surgeries after *Thriller*. They say he even stopped listening to his family and became even more cut off from them. It's a pity losing him, he was so talented, and Yusuf's lament was heartfelt. He recalled how growing up in Oman in the 1980s they used to imitate Michael's every move, the clothing, the glove.

During Michael's stay, they invited his children's nanny, Grace, to their house. She is from Rwanda. She is a sweet, wonderful woman, he said. When we invited her she said she would only come if we had Rwandan food. We said of course, and we had lots of Rwandan food. She spent hours that afternoon with them.

As Yusuf drove me back to the hotel he suggested a meeting for me with the Rwandese consul-general, who is also an African Omani. He will let me know tomorrow. Clearly, Yusuf loves both Rwanda and Oman. The development and peace and stability in Oman, he said, raises questions about the desirability of western-style democracy which might bring conflict here, unnecessary conflict among the people of different ethnicities and places of origin. I thought it was an interesting, if revealing, diasporic twist to supporting benevolent monarchical rule.

July 11, 2009

Ibrahim called quite excitedly, you are going to meet a prince today. And so I did. He picked me up after breakfast to take me to the house of the prince. By the standards of the well-to-do in Muscat like Ali Mahruqy, it was not an exceptional home. The rulers in Zanzibar generally live simple lives. Much of the pomp and ceremony of palace life was introduced later by the British, the prince explained. Their houses are quite ordinary and they were open to receive anyone.

We found the gate open, proof, according to Ibrahim, that important people here, including royalty and ministers, do not need protection, so close as they are to the people. We were welcomed at the door by a Zanzibari woman who led us into the eclectically furnished house. The prince, a tall man with a lazy eye stretched his arms and pumped my hands.

As we sat down my eyes immediately darted to a wall behind the prince. There were pictures of the Sultan of Zanzibar at the beginning of the twentieth century in his regalia. It was the same man whose picture Ibrahim had shown me the first day we met. Sultan Ali bin Hamud, the prince explained at one point, was sent to study in England. He came back hating white people. He was a modernizer who embarked on building schools, roads and other social infrastructure. But the British didn't like him and he was deposed. He died in France in 1928 where part of his family still lives. The rest of the family remained in Zanzibar and his brother took over. The prince is a member of the Zanzibari royal family. He is descended from people of several nationalities. The mother of his grandfather was from Abyssinia, he said. She had been captured as a young girl and brought to Zanzibar. She was the daughter of a local ruler. One of his great-grandmothers was from Georgia in the former Soviet Union and another from Malawi. So he grew up in the palace where there were people of various shades of color, but there was no discrimination based on that, he insisted. Divisions between black and white would have been inconceivable. The Sultan himself, he said pointing to the picture above him, was black.

Ibrahim later mentioned that the prince is quite light; his brother is as dark as I am. He added that he wished he had taken me to the funeral the other day where I would have seen all shades of Zanzibaris and Arabs from dark to light. Arabs are not a race, the prince explained. They constitute people of different complexions, origins, and nationalities. They range from Syrian white, Yemeni brown, to Sudanese black. Their Arabness comes from the fact that they speak the same language, despite local variations, and they identify as Arab through their paternal lineages. Color consciousness was brought by colonialism. In Zanzibar it grew after the revolution. Before it didn't matter what color one was, for how could he, for example discriminate against his own brother. Ibrahim recalled Mazrui's statement in his television series, that if the father was a Mazrui, the child was a Mazrui regardless of the status or origins of the mother. For Arabs, children of Arab men are Arab regardless of the race or ethnicity of the mother. Mazrui once posed, counterfactually, what this would have meant for African Americans if Arabs had been the conquerors of the United States who brought the enslaved Africans. They would have been Arabs because many would have been offspring of Arab men and as native speakers of Arabic. The flexibility of Arab cultural identity allows for inclusion while the inflexibility of European racial identity necessitates exclusion. Predictably, the prince turned to the subject of slavery. He began by observing that slavery is forbidden by Islam. It is only allowed during religious wars. Practicing Muslims are not supposed to condone slavery and are expected, if they have slaves, to treat them humanely. In fact, they are encouraged to free them and their offspring are not supposed to be slaves. There has been a lot of propaganda about Arabs as slave traders. As before, I found this a tad bit over defensive and there were times when contradictions emerged. But the general thrust of the argument is one I am sympathetic to—that Arab slavery has been grossly exaggerated to establish equivalence with Atlantic slavery and thereby absolve the Europeans of guilt. He pointed out that Oman was far eclipsed by Saudi Arabia, which had the region's largest slave market. The slaves mainly came from Europe and Ethiopia. He also observed that in East Africa not only was slavery propagated by the Africans themselves who brought the slaves to the

coast, but it is quite remarkable that none of the big ethnic groups, he referred to them as tribes, were among the enslaved — not the Baganda, Maasai, Nyamwezi, Kikuyu. None of their people were among the tribes in Zanzibar. This suggests that the strong African 'tribes' preyed on the weak. An intriguing observation, I thought, but I am not sure how accurate. Certainly with regard to the Yao they were both perpetrators and victims of slavery in East Africa.

In East Africa the propaganda against Arabs as slave traders was propagated by European missionaries, despite the fact that they were assisted in settling in the region by those same Arabs. David Livingstone and Johan Ludwig Kraft, for example, would not have done much without the assistance of the Sultan and the Arabs, yet in return for such hospitality they spread vicious lies about the Arab slave trade. Colonialism created terrible stereotypes of the Swahili as untrustworthy, conniving, and tricksters. Yet the same colonialists used Kiswahili and literate Swahili staff for spreading and consolidating colonial rule. Ibrahim added that it was precisely because of this deployment of Kiswahili that the language spread while the standing of the Swahili themselves fell, for in situations where people tended to associate language with ethnicity, the African interlocutors of the colonial administration were seen as Swahili when in most cases they were not, since people from one ethnic group were deployed to another region.

The 1964 Zanzibar revolution promised change but brought genocide and stagnation, the prince said. As a socialist-leaning young person at the time, he hoped that when Karume took power things would improve. But of course they didn't, they got worse. Ibrahim chipped in with the details about the genocide that I could now recount verbatim. The prince made a joke about ideology and age. If you are not a socialist at 17, something is wrong with your heart; if you are still a socialist at 40 something is wrong with your head. The revolution was not about socialism, about improving people's lives; rather it was against the imagined sins of Arab slavery. It has left a terrible legacy of self-hatred among Arabs in Zanzibar and those who came to Oman who blame themselves for the wrongs committed by their forefathers. It has also left a legacy of hatred for Africans among them, Ibrahim added later. He also observed trenchantly that the tragic irony of the genocide is that it was directed at so-called Arabs who were the only true descendants of the enslaved Africans and Arab masters. Whose sins were they being punished for, their mother's too?

The prince believes the hatred and violence are so entrenched in the world that Islamic teaching offers a way out. He has studied many religions but he concluded that Islam is best poised to encourage understanding and peace among people. He talked about the ethical principles embedded in Islam, its strict practices even over cleanliness, its tolerance over other faiths compared to Christianity, and so on. Then the conversation turned to Islam in the United States and how many of the enslaved Africans were Muslims so that Islam did not emerge in the twentieth century but was there from the very inception of the new settler state. I could contribute on this conversation and I mentioned some of the works I have read on the subject, the activities of the African Muslims, challenges they faced, the resurgence of Islam in the twentieth century, and developments in other parts of the Americas. Ibrahim mentioned that a descendant of one of the early African-American Muslims who was enslaved, Abdul Rahman, about whom a film was recently made called *Prince Among Slaves*, has returned to Chicago to retrace the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather.

I gently prodded the conversation back to Oman and Zanzibar. The prince came here in 1974. He has been back to Tanzania several times. When the Zanzibaris came to Oman,

he said, most of them did not speak Arabic. Typical Omani migrants to East Africa progressively lost command of Arabic. Usually by the third generation they spoke only Swahili and no Arabic. His Swahili grandfather had probably 80% command of Arabic while the prince's generation had practically none. So they had to learn Arabic when they came here. The Sultan welcomed the Zanzibaris to help him modernize the country. He didn't differentiate between Omanis and Zanzibaris, he emphasized. There has been so much development that Omani kids have no clue how bad things used to be. Coming here of course represented a reversal of the historical trend. In the past, Zanzibar was like heaven for Omanis. Now that the tables have turned it is Oman that can help Zanzibar. Many years ago the Omani government showed great interest in promoting development in Zanzibar, focusing on the telecommunications and transportation sectors, but the Tanzanian government threw a wrench in it because it didn't want to see Zanzibar develop by itself with assistance from Oman. If Tanzania had played its cards better, the Sultan and his government would have done a lot for Zanzibar and even the mainland.

The prince's last statement to me before we left was that I should think of becoming a Muslim, for I already had the demeanor of a good Muslim. I responded with a measured chuckle. Then he addressed both of us, how lonely life was in retirement, especially now that his wife was visiting relatives back home in Zanzibar.

Ibrahim drove me to the campus. It is a beautiful campus both in terms of the buildings and the landscaping. One forgets it is located in an arid terrain. Everything looked so clean and fresh—flowers, hedges and palm trees—not to mention spotless and well-designed faculty offices, student residences, classrooms and labs, and the magnificent mosque. The university has about 16,000 students and has grown rapidly in recent years. Fortunately, it has lots of land for expansion, Ibrahim observed. Currently, some of the dorms for the men have been given over to women; the male students who can't be accommodated are encouraged to live off campus. We ended up at the university hospital where we had lunch in the cafeteria. Food is cheap here, he said. And it tasted so. More enjoyable was looking at the medical staff and students, at least half of whom were women in their immaculate white coats. His Majesty has been opening up the professions steadily to women, Ibrahim beamed.

From the campus he drove me to a nearby village, which in Malawi would look more like an isolated small suburb than a village as such. That is true of many of the villages I have seen here. As we were going there he got a long phone call from a Zanzibari friend of his. He put her on speaker phone so I could hear. She comes from, or rather she has traced her patrilineage to Rustaq. She came to Oman 30 years ago and has been haunted by an experience she had in grade 3 class. She was the only Arab kid in the class in Central Tanzania. She couldn't believe what she heard. It was a class on the slave trade. The teacher talked about Arabs enslaving Africans. The kids she had been friends with completely broke up with her. She was devastated. When she asked her parents at home they thought she was crazy. Where would we have kept the slaves, they wondered. They didn't even have enough to feed their own children. Ibrahim convinced her to come and talk to me at length at the hotel.

I had the rest of the day to myself, which I didn't mind. It gave me a chance to catch up on online news and follow Obama's visit to Ghana. His speech to the parliamentarians left me both elated and upset, elated that he was talking about democracy, upset that he was berating Africa without criticizing western policies in the continent as he did in his Cairo speech that was beamed to the so-called Muslim world. I softened when I heard

his speech at the former slave castle, but only a little. I will write a blog tomorrow to clear up my feelings and thoughts about his visit.

July 12, 2009

Today turned out to be a great fitting end to my visit. Saada Al-Ghafary called me when I was busy writing my blog on Obama's visit to Ghana. We had agreed to meet at 2:30 and I expected to be done by then, but this was around 1:00 p.m. I had no choice but to agree that she could come. I was glad that she did. She is sharp and feisty. I greeted her in Kiswahili and she was a little startled that I knew the language. I told her I lived in Kenya for many years where I picked up bits and pieces of Kiswahili. She hadn't Googled me yet because the Internet was acting up at her office, she joked. She asked me what I wanted to eat. I told her I had no particular preferences. She took me to a chic restaurant on the side of the road near a bay facing a hotel, shops, homes on a slope, and the sea. The views were spectacular. We sat by the window and ordered salads.

Four years older than me, as I later found out, Saada was born and raised in Central Tanzania as an Arab, although her grandmother was African. She completed her primary, secondary, and undergraduate education in Tanzania, a diploma in Britain, and an MA and PhD at the University of Georgia in the U.S. She is a trained teacher but now works in educational media.

Saada started from where she had left off on the phone in Ibrahim's car yesterday. She became interested in history when she heard about the Arab slave trade in her grade 3 class. How does an eight-year-old deal with losing friends because of a classroom lesson? She was deeply hurt and never forgot it. In middle school, she could play with other Arab kids. But in boarding school she returned to being the only Arab kid. A lot of hurtful things were said to her and she would go home crying and ask her parents, what did our ancestors do for me to be treated like this?

Her parents divorced when she was very young. Her mother remarried and they moved to Pemba. It was different from the mainland. The people were mostly brown from the long history of intermarriages between Africans and Arabs. Pemba was also a more homogeneous community than Zanzibar, which received regular infusions of new people from Arabia coming with the monsoon winds or from the mainland. Saada was sent to attend a madrasa but she noticed that her brothers were going to government schools. When she asked her mother, she would always say she was too small. One day she ran away, following one of her brothers to school. The servant found her at the school after looking for her everywhere. She was four. My rebelliousness started early, she grinned. While visiting relatives on the mainland, her mother got news from her cousin, her former husband—as marriage among cousins were quite common in those days—that her husband had divorced her. So they didn't return to Pemba. Her uncle became her male guardian. He noticed that Saada was already good at reading and encouraged her. Most inland Arab girls didn't go to school. Her own mother was not educated. Her uncle saw her as a trailblazer and had her enrolled in grade 2.

She was in grade 3 when the incident happened. Saada would ask her parents, her uncle, and her African cousins what was wrong with Arabs. Her uncle didn't understand the question, and her African cousins would just laugh. In government boarding school

she confronted challenges against her Muslim identity. During Ramadan she and other Muslim girls were not allowed to stay in their rooms during meal times for fasting. The English teacher would tell them they could fast but they should sit in the dining room. She thought that was cruel. To add insult to injury, evening meals started at 6:00 p.m., while fasting ended at 6:45 p.m. by which time the food was cold. They were supposed to have a late meal as well but none of the teachers were interested in making themselves available. All these deliberate insults were hurtful but they couldn't tell their parents for fear that they would be pulled out of school. They wanted an education like everybody else. The cooks eventually prevailed on the teachers to allow the Muslim students not to sit with the other students while they were eating during Ramadan.

The final straw was when they were asked to say the Christian Lord's Prayers. They didn't understand why they should do that as Muslims when the Christian students were not expected to join Muslim prayer. It took a mini strike for this to be changed. Everybody was allowed quiet time to say their prayers. As if the religious assaults were not enough, Saada was abused when she complained of blisters from pounding maize for their cornmeal, she murmured. For goodness sake, she was only ten years old. The other girls were cruel, saying, do you think we are your slaves?

She persevered and learned to defend herself. Saada would hurl the insults about slavery right back: your people must have been stupid to allow slavery to happen to them. She was eleven by then. She has never been able to shut her mouth since then, she hollered. I learned self-defense, she said with great self-satisfaction. Some of my friends here sometimes don't understand why I talk so loud. Saada told none of this to her parents. She could see from an early age how women were treated, regardless of whether they were African, Arab, or Indian. It was clear that the only way to avoid such a fate was for her to get educated. Her uncle was progressive and became her chief supporter. She would sit and discuss issues with him to the surprise of many people. She would ask him why women did all the hard work at home not the men. Culture, he would say. Who makes culture?, she would persist.

None of Saada's terrible experiences dissuaded her from making friends with the African girls. The boys, of course, were a different story. She still keeps in touch with many of her old friends from those days. She went to secondary school in Ntwala on the Tanzania-Mozambique border. Her mother cried when she boarded the bus, which she didn't understand at the time. It's hard for parents to let their children leave home and go to places where they can't protect them. We reminisced about boarding schools, how they force you to develop skills and the flexibility to deal with unfamiliar people, places, and situations, not to mention communities, cultures and countries. In secondary school there was only one other Arab girl and an Indian girl and both were commuters. She saw how cruel the African girls could be. It was even worse during national holidays, she paused, perhaps wondering whether to give details or not, or maybe simply overwhelmed by the flood of memories.

Saada is both Arab and African, she said adamantly. She can't discriminate against herself as she has the blood of both, she is both. People who despise the Arab side of her identity are just ignorant. She often asks them whether that makes them feel better about themselves by attacking her Arabness. She has no problems with her African cousins; they are fine with who she is. It is the same with the uneducated people. The educated ones seem to have problems. She went into a long discussion about the role Arabs played during the struggle for independence. Unlike Indians, they actively supported independence.

After all, they had earlier struggled against British colonization. The Arabs considered themselves to be Tanzanians. Her father went to Tanzania from Oman at age 13, following her grandfather who had come earlier. Her father didn't want to come back to Oman. He finally did for a visit 60 years later. During the independence celebrations, Saada remembers her elder sister cooking huge pots of rice for people as part of the festivities.

The revolution in Zanzibar destroyed much of the goodwill among people of the island and between Arabs and Africans elsewhere in the country. A lot of people they knew on the islands moved over to the mainland. There was a lot of discrimination; many cruel things were done, including forced marriages and mass rape. Her voice was trembling with anger. People, including the government, try to minimize the atrocities in Zanzibar. There were a lot of good people who acted heroically during the atrocities. She has relatives who were saved by being hidden by their servants. No one was ever killed by their own servants, which puts the lie to the notion that Arabs are cruel.

Africa and Arabia are deeply interconnected, Saada said, repeating the point Ibrahim and Ali have made. They shared a common landmass before the emergence of the Red Sea. More importantly, Arabs have always been traders who crossed the borders between Arabia and Africa. When Islam came, the connections continued as before, except that a new cultural dimension was added. She would like to find out how many Arabs are pure, whatever that means. Who is Arab?, she asked. She believes that Arabs are multicultural by definition. She is certainly bicultural, which gives her a kind of bilingualism, an ability to see, understand and empathize with multiple points of view, experiences, and cultures.

Saada had no plans to leave Tanzania and resettle in Oman. It happened by accident as it were. She was teaching at a boys' secondary school in Dar es Salaam. She was only 21 after completing her studies at the University of Dar es Salaam. Some of her students were older than her, and she was the only Arab teacher. Students tried to undermine her as a young, female, Arab teacher. She also knew that students had crushes on her. But there was this particular student who was almost a stalker. Whenever she was writing on the board and her back was turned, he would make lewd movements. One time she turned back and caught him in the act and threw him out of class. He reported her to the third school master who returned to her class and asked her to leave the classroom. Saada refused and instead threw him out too. The students were stunned. They suddenly realized she was not one to mess around with. She reported the third master to the headmaster. The former started harassing her. In the meantime, her sister was then quite ill in Dubai and needed someone to look after her. She came to take care of her and failed to go back to her job in time. When she did, the third master escalated his harassment. She quit. By then she was married and had no money. She spent one year in Abu Dhabi. A couple of times she came to Oman the *vipanga*—underground—way. She finally got a job and went to visit the village her grandfather came from where she was accepted.

There were a lot of adjustments and cultural negotiations she had to make. The first concerned dressing. While in Tanzania she was quite fashionable—she would wear miniskirts and short-sleeved shirts but her new found relatives here didn't like this. This is a much more conservative society than Tanzania. She decided to read more about Islam to find out how it guided the lives of her relatives and the people she worked with. She came to understand and appreciate their objectives. I now wear abayas, she said pointing to her abaya and the headscarf that she would periodically adjust. Abayas are not Omani; she explained. Bedouins in the interior of Oman wear colorful clothes, sometimes overlaid

with a light black top. The rest of the Omanis wore colorful clothes. I didn't ask why she adopted the black abaya. Could it be a case of diasporic over-compensation, as Yusuf implied the other night?

The second major area of negotiation and adjustment concerned gender segregation. In Tanzania, Muslim men and women mix a lot more than here. Here men and women tend to have their own quarters and eat separately. The fact that she didn't grow up with her father also meant she wasn't even exposed to gender segregation in Muslim homes there. She has not fully adjusted to this one aspect. When she is at home here, her uncle proudly invites her to greet visitors and he shows off about her education.

When she came here she only had an education diploma from the University of Dar es Salaam. Oman sponsored her for another diploma in England and the MA and PhD in the U.S. She also had to learn Arabic. In Tanzania, it was the boys rather than the girls in the family who were taught Arabic. One of the more memorable moments was when her father visited in 1979 and apologized to her for his acrimonious divorce with her mother. She was deeply touched and decided to bury her long-standing grudge against him.

At the very least there are 100,000 East Africans in Oman; probably a lot more. This is a sizeable community given that the country's population is about 2 million. The community has done very well in all walks of life. The locals call all the people from Africa, which for them primarily means East Africa, Zanzibaris. Like any label, the term can be used positively or negatively. When Saada is asked whether she is a Zanzibari she asks the person who is asking why they are asking. She refuses to be marginalized. The Zanzibaris not only include people of Arab patrilineage but also Baluchis. Since there are Omani Baluchis, this puts the Zanzibari Baluchis in a complicated position.

Among the East Africans, those from Zanzibar have done the best because they came when the country was opening up and embarking on its current modernization drive, to which they contributed immensely. Others who came later have done relatively well too but not as well as this first wave. Arabic is offered for the returnees, as they sometimes are called, as well as opportunities for further education or professional training as happened in Saada's case.

When Saada's father came, all the people who ever visited him in Tanzania and knew him there came to pay their respects. In Tanzania, all the Arabs treat each other as brothers. At the end of the visit he said it was now time to go back home, and they asked him where was home, and he replied, Tanzania of course. Oman is now home for Saada, although of course she feels at home when she visits Tanzania. We had a fascinating exchange on our conceptions of home and agreed that we must embrace our multiplicities, become truly rooted cosmopolitans, diasporans who belong comfortably and productively in their countries of origin and residence. She noted how multicultural her family is, including her own son who now lives in Nashville, Tennessee. Her two sisters are married to Africans, one of her brothers lives in Canada, and she herself was once married to a Tanzanian of Indian origin. So her son is partly Indian, Arab and African and her son's wife is European and Filipino.

The transnational possibilities offered by diasporas should be embraced as tools of African development. Saada was deeply troubled that there was such vehement opposition on Tanzanet, the Tanzanian electronic networking group, against assistance from the Omani Zanzibaris and the Omani government itself. She recounted a recent debate in which some screamed *we don't need their aid!* It came in the context of a vicious debate about Tanzanian nationalism in which some sought to attribute everything to the great

leadership of Nyerere and didn't want to hear about the role played by others, including trade unions and ordinary people, let alone Arabs and Indians. But she takes them on, exposing their biases informed by misguided Christian and African racial arrogance. Some do listen. She mentioned one Tanzania scholar, Lawrence Mbogoni, based in the U.S. who eventually wrote a book, *The Cross versus the Crescent*, exposing the atrocities committed in Zanzibar under Nyerere's leadership. Saada firmly believes in reconciliation, even for the most heinous crimes such as the genocide in Rwanda and the crime against humanity that was apartheid in South Africa. She talked wistfully of following their truth and reconciliation processes.

We stayed in the restaurant for more than four hours as customers came and went. On the way to dropping me off, Saada passed through her apartment to collect her maid for a study session of the Qur'an. The maid is from Tanzania and I greeted her in Kiswahili, but quickly added I am from Malawi and don't speak Kiswahili. She smiled, pleased to meet a man from one of Tanzania's neighboring countries. We agreed to keep in touch.

As if the encounter with Saada was not enough for one day, Ibrahim called breathlessly. You must be a blessed man, he exclaimed. As I have been saying, you were brought here for a purpose. Dr. Johnson, my mentor, has agreed to see you, he said. He just returned but he is willing to meet you. Half an hour later he came to pick me up. He asked if I wanted to go by a restaurant for a quick bite, for he was hungry. I said I was still full from the lunch with Saada but I could go with him. When we got to a supermarket for him to buy Dr. Johnson a belated birthday gift of champagne and chocolate, he decided to buy himself a snack, which he ate in the car. In the supermarket we ran into several people speaking Swahili. The women were wearing abayas while the men wore ordinary pants and shirts. One stopped and greeted Ibrahim, although he seemed not to recognize her until she reminded him she knows him from the university.

We drove into an upscale suburb. The house was palatial; all painted white. A lightly gray-haired man opened the door. He was immaculately dressed with a checkered tie, yellow shirt, a blazer, and matching pants. His smile was like a portrait, one that he might paint. His handshake was vigorous, his walk firm and steady. The house oozed elegance and artistry, a beautiful space for creativity and contemplation. The floors were translucent white marble, the doors and double stairway to the upstairs were made of fine mahogany with Islamic styling, the walls were adorned with priceless works of art — his own.

Dr. Johnson is the world-renowned 94-year-old African-American artist and historian who has been feted by presidents and royalty, his work has been celebrated for decades, and his friends and acquaintances over his long and fruitful life constitute the who's who of the Pan-African world from W.E.B. Du Bois to Jomo Kenyatta who offered him Kenyan citizenship in the 1960s, to the world at large from the French to the Russians. He is now an Omani citizen by a special dispensation of the Sultan. I knew the moment I sat down in his living room and he started talking that I was in the presence of a genius. I felt as humbled as I did when I met Abdias dos Nascimento in Brazil. Ibrahim was right. I felt fortunate to meet him.

As he showed me the beautifully appointed house and some of his artwork, he talked about his life and work, his invitations by Jomo Kenyatta to do paintings of his arrest and other aspects of the struggle for independence in Kenya; by Leonid Brezhnev in the former Soviet Union where he painted Alexander Pushkin; by the current Sultan Qaboos to do a pictorial history of Oman. He regaled us with stories of efforts by the American

ambassador to give him a passport, which he resisted, for he no longer felt American. His mother had once told him home was where he felt at home; and it was here, as it was in Kenya before that where he felt at home, not in the United States. Each time he visited the U.S. he felt out of place.

His mind was sharp and lucid, his recollections of events that happened long before I was born were riveting. He pointed to his massive bedroom where several books were open under one lamp shade. I try to know five new things each day that I didn't know the day before, he said quietly. His hunger for knowledge, for learning, his infinite wisdom, was palpable. It was truly humbling. He was the epitome of the true intellectual and artist, a man profoundly fascinated by ideas and knowledge, always trying to understand the world and humanity a little deeper each day. He exuded a generosity of understanding, a love of life, a passion for art, and a commitment to humanity, historicity, and globalism of African peoples that I found profoundly moving. Meeting him justified the trip to Oman.

When we returned to the living room, he pulled out a manuscript of a book he has been working on. It is a biography of Malik Ambar, the great Indian general of Ethiopian origins who lived to the ripe old age of 80 and left a lasting mark on Indian history as the pioneer of guerrilla warfare in the Deccan region and who was a formidable foe of the Mughals. He told us of the meticulous research he had done in libraries around the world, the trips he had taken tracing Malik's journey from his birthplace in Harar, Ethiopia to India. I marveled as I listened to him, and especially as he treated us to reading portions of the manuscript. His rich baritone, with its Southern musical drawl that had survived half a century of émigré life from the U.S., and his beautifully crafted prose, brought Malik alive. I was taken back to India, to Janjira fort, to Delhi Museum, to the texts I had read and taught about this illustrious member of the African diaspora.

As we left a couple of hours later, Dr. Johnson gave me an autographed copy of his book *Oman: A Pictorial Resurrection*, in which he wrote, "With sincere hopes of man and by the grace of Allah that you always walk in the light and your shadows never diminish." If I were not leaving tomorrow, I would have loved to come back and talk to him at greater length, learn from him his insights on the triumphant and tragic histories of African peoples around the world. All I could do was to thank him for showing me tonight illuminating slivers of his work, for the inspiring example of his long, rich life, of perpetual and profound intellectual engagement. I felt immensely grateful to Ibrahim. On the way back, he looked immeasurably proud that he had introduced me to his great mentor, Dr. Johnson.

July 13, 2009

It is bittersweet every time I leave. Today, it is particularly so because this marks not only the end of my 2009 trips, but of the project as a whole. It is tempting to take stock of what has been accomplished and the inevitable regrets. I will resist doing that for, by and large, I feel the last four years of summer travels have been worth it. My knowledge of the African diaspora has broadened and deepened considerably. I have collected immense amounts of material and information and met an incredible number of people. I may not be much wiser than before as far as the conceptions and constructions of African diaspora

histories, societies, cultures, and identities go, but I am now more convinced that this is an infinitely complex subject beyond the grasp of any one individual. All one can do, all I can try to do in publications that arise out of these travels and the project as whole, is simply to provide my own narrative, an analytical narrative that is obviously partial, even problematic, but has the coherence and authenticity of a personal encounter with the many complex, contradictory, and always changing worlds of African diasporas.

I do have some regrets, after all. The biggest one is that I was unable to go to Saudi Arabia because I couldn't get a visa. They gave me the run around, first when I applied to the Saudi Consulate in New York. I filled out the forms and sent my passport, only to hear back from them that I should apply for the visa when I am in the region. I tried to do so when I arrived in the Gulf and continued trying to get the visa until a few days ago. The Saudi embassy in Muscat turned around to tell me that I should have gotten it while I was in the U.S.! This is the first country in all my travels around the world where I have failed to get a visa. It speaks volumes about its insularity. Saudi Arabia is crucial in understanding African diaspora histories, both historic and contemporary. As the center of Islam, it has always been at the crossroads of African migrations and diaspora formations. For centuries, each year tens of thousands of Muslims from across Africa made the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and invariably some stayed and built new communities. More recently, others have come, attracted by the oil economy. Today, Saudi Arabia reportedly has the second largest African-born population in the world after France, estimated at 1.5 million.

Another regret is that while visiting different parts of the U.S. and Canada for this project I did not take daily notes of my observations, experiences, and encounters. In hindsight, this would have made for fascinating comparative reading. The reasoning behind this decision was my high degree of familiarity with African diaspora histories in the two countries where I have lived the bulk of my adult life. The volume of the diaspora literature in the two countries is so vast, especially in the United States, that personal ethnographic engagements seemed far less pressing. As for the Bahamas, where I spent several days after leaving Cuba, my only excuse for not embarking on extensive research is that I was tired and needed a break. I did take sporadic notes, talked to many people, and acquired a lot of publications, but I did not have much energy to take daily accounts as I did elsewhere. All three countries, and others in the Americas that I have visited on previous occasions, or lived in as I did in Jamaica in the early 1980s, and might visit in the near future such as Colombia, which has a large African diaspora population, will feature in the scholarly volumes I am planning to write on the global histories of African diasporas.

I thought I would spend the day reflecting on the end of my research travels until my flight. In his infinite kindness Ibrahim came to see me. He was nursing a cold. I checked out. The hotel staff was as friendly as ever. Several were Afro-Omani. Ibrahim drove us to his house where we had a late lunch. Partly because of his cold, and maybe because of our impending separation, our conversation was less animated. Nonetheless, I enjoyed his company until he took me to the airport in the early evening. We hugged heartily and promised to meet again in one of our multiple diasporic destinations.

The airport was half empty, and so was the flight back to Dubai, where I caught the overnight flight to Frankfurt. On both legs I had the adjacent seats to myself, which suited me fine, for I wanted to continue reflecting on the trip and the project, write this entry, and get some sleep.

July 14, 2009

We arrived at Frankfurt in the early morning before the airport became a beehive of activity. The coffee shops were not yet open. When they did open, I helped myself to breakfast, picked up several English-language newspapers, and surfed the Internet. I felt tired but was on a strange high, perhaps the anticipation of getting back home and leaving a day later for Los Angeles to look for new accommodation. It suddenly dawned on me that I was about to take a decisively new step in my professional life. I had done administration since 1994, but this time it would be different. As dean, the demands on my time and energies would be infinitely greater than anything I have ever experienced. Having taught since the age of 27, I felt more than ready for my new life as a full time administrator. I was ready for new challenges. I would continue my research and writing but perhaps at a slower pace than before. And once I get the hang of the job, I will try to teach one course a year to keep my classroom fires burning.

The flight to Chicago was packed. As fate would have it, I sat next two Indian women, a mother and a daughter who were returning to Alabama where they lived. I mentioned to them that my son had gone to school in Alabama. But they didn't seem too keen on conversation, which suited me fine. I tried to watch a movie, but none of them could hold my interest. Reading the magazines I had bought at the airport proved more gripping. At one time, I couldn't help intervening in the conversation the mother and daughter were having with a white couple in the next aisle. They were boasting about snowy winters in northern India and how light-skinned people there were.

I was in India recently, I said, and this time of the year it is scorching hot, and many Indians are quite dark-skinned. They didn't seem too amused. This caught the attention of an African-American woman sitting next to the white couple. What were you doing in India?, she asked. I told her. They all looked amazed that there were people of African descent in India, except the mother and daughter, who turned to each other and lost interest in the conversation. I almost burst out laughing. There are many Indians in Africa as well, I said. Mother and daughter were now immersed in their own conversation. Both Africa and Asia have each other's diasporas, I thought to myself.

We landed in Chicago in the early afternoon. My search for the African diaspora was over, at least for now.

Conclusion: The Encounters, Experiences, and Engagements of Africa's Global Diasporas

When I embarked on this project, I had little idea of how demanding physically, consuming emotionally, and exhilarating intellectually it would be traversing the world in search of peoples of African descent. Many of my assumptions and preconceptions were constantly challenged and subsequently redefined. I was forced to rethink basic notions undergirding the project: what does the term diaspora mean?; what is the African diaspora?; who qualifies to be considered part of the African diaspora?; how have African diasporas been formed and changed over time in different world regions?; how have they produced and reproduced themselves and their identities?; how have they engaged Africa?; how do the histories of African diasporas affect the way we think about diasporas, theorize diaspora? This resulted in a series of scholarly essays in which I sought to sharpen my conceptual understanding of African diaspora formations as histories, processes, conditions, and connections. A couple of the essays were written before I embarked on the travels, many during the four years I conducted my research travels, and several afterwards (Zezeza 2004, 2005a, 2007a, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

From the encounters and testimonies featured in this book, it became quite clear to me that African diasporas are indeed global and multilayered, characterized by broad distinctions between Afro-America, Afro-Europe, and Afro-Asia. There are diverse histories of dispersal and diasporization within and among regions. Despite these differences, the experiences of African diaspora communities have generally been characterized by exploitation, oppression, marginalization, and protracted struggles for liberation, citizenship, and empowerment. I was also struck by the complexities and high levels of cultural retentions and survivals, innovations and syncretisms, diversity and dynamism. Equally remarkable is the transnationalization of diaspora identities, solidarities, mobilities, and expressive cultures. An important aspect of the networks of diaspora transnationalization involves diaspora experiences and engagements with Africa both real and imaginary. The engagements encompass connections that are political, economic, demographic, discursive and cultural in nature. In many of the countries I visited, I found that besides relations with Africa, among Africa's overlapping diasporas the question of intra-diasporan relations is exceedingly complex. Intra-diasporan relations are marked by dialogues and dissensions, collaborations and conflicts, solidarities and separatisms. Another quite intriguing, but not surprising, phenomenon I encountered were the deeply conflicted views African diasporas hold about Africa. Diaspora attitudes to Africa range from the antagonistic to the ambivalent to the affirmative.

The Politics and Paradigms of African Diaspora Studies

During the course of my travels, I became more acutely aware than ever of the politics and contested paradigms scholars use in studies of African diasporas. It is quite astonishing to note given how rapidly the field has grown that the widespread use of the term African diaspora to describe peoples of African descent outside the continent did not emerge until the 1950s and 1960s. The academic use of the term in Africana studies is often attributed to an essay by the British historian, George Shepperson, "The African Abroad, or the African Diaspora," delivered at the International Congress of African Historians at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1965. None of the major intellectual forerunners of African diaspora studies from Edward Blyden to W.E.B. Du Bois to the negritude writers used the term. Previously other terms were used to invoke the internationalization of Africa and its peoples. The most prominent was the concept of Pan-Africanism, which served more to describe political connections and as a tool for mobilization than a term of analysis of diaspora phenomena in all their dimensions.

The rise of African diasporas as an influential paradigm in studies of African peoples can be attributed to complex developments outside and within the academy. Africa's decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s served as a crucial watershed in repositioning Africa in world politics, in changing the terms of engagement and discourse about the continent and its peoples at home and abroad. It led to important shifts in the politics of Pan-Africanism itself (Zezeza 2011a) and paradigms of African studies, the effect of which was to recenter Africa and recast Africa's global migrations and presence through the capacious concept of diaspora. Bolstering the political popularity of the diaspora more recently has been the investment by African states in the developmental possibilities held by their diasporas especially through remittances and skills transfer. This is best encapsulated in the designation of the diaspora by the African Union as Africa's sixth region although the implications of this are yet to be fully spelled out.

In the meantime, many African diaspora communities themselves became more vocal in their self-representation, in their demands for difference and inclusion. This is quite evident among the new African diasporas recorded in this book in Britain, France, Germany, and Spain. On the one hand, this reflects the glocalization of pan-ethnic identities and racial formations, both old and new, and on the other the growth of bureaucratic multiculturalism in western countries. The role of international forums cannot be discounted. In this context, as evident in this book one can mention the mobilizational effects of the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism for African diasporas from Brazil to India.

Reflecting and reinforcing these political and ideological imperatives that gave the notion of African diasporas potency, are intellectual dynamics including the growth of African studies globally, the Africana studies movement in the United States, and ethnic and minority studies in western universities more generally (Zezeza 2003, 2007b, 2007c, 2011b). It can also be attributed to the rise of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and globalization studies, which collectively recast the questions of culture, identity, and transnationalism in African studies previously dominated by structuralist perspectives inspired by Marxist and dependency paradigms superimposed on age-old Eurocentric notions of eternal African marginality, the strange fiction that the continent was irredeemably irrelevant and splendidly isolated from the rest of the world.

Part of the appeal of the diaspora paradigm to historians is that Africa is reconnected to its peoples dispersed around the world, thereby globalizing Africa, repositioning the

continent in world history, and reframing Euro-American historiography and disciplinary traditions. The discovery of an Afro-Asian diaspora formed prior to European global hegemony, for example, disrupts Eurocentric narratives of global history by demonstrating independent transoceanic and transcontinental interactions between Africa and Asia. This is one of the primary appeals of the diaspora concept to a historian like me. Scholars from other disciplines have also come to appreciate the analytical potency of the diaspora concept, and made significant contributions to diaspora studies as they seek to analyze the anthropologies, archaeologies, geographies, arts, expressive cultures, genetic affinities, politics, philosophies, and sociologies of African diaspora communities, contributions, and connections.

In fact, the field of diaspora studies is marked by vigorous interdisciplinarity in which Africa is seen as central, diaspora identities are understood in their complex intersectionalities, multiplicity of sources including nondiscursive expressions are valued, and greater intellectual genealogy and authority is accorded to diaspora thinkers, artists and activists than is common in the Eurocentric traditions of the Euro-America academy. Consequently, African diaspora studies are increasingly marked by a wealth of spatial, temporal, topical, and thematic foci. In their historical geography, the studies range from those that have sought to reconstruct the history of the entire African diaspora to those that tell the spread of a particular ethnic or national diaspora such as the Yoruba and Somali. Some seek to compare particular structures, phenomena and processes among African diasporas within or between countries and regions. Others concentrate on specific locations and issues concerning African diaspora identities, ideas, activities, and experiences as manifest in politics, economy, art, music, dance, and religion and as inscribed in objects, buildings, bodies, landscapes, and discourses.

This can be seen in this book in which I sought to experience and examine the diaspora condition in multiple settings from textual readings, formal interviews, conference presentations, and museum visits to impromptu conversations in restaurants, private homes, and taxis, and quirky observations at airports, public festivals, and on the streets. Instead of seeking epistemic authority from Eurocentric scholarship that dominates global knowledge production including diaspora studies, I relished talking to the diaspora intelligentsia as well as ordinary people because it is they, I believe, who best understand their own histories, struggles, triumphs and tragedies. I gained invaluable insights from academics, artists and students as I did from activists, entrepreneurs, and taxi drivers.

Accompanying the intellectual imperatives in the development of diaspora studies are institutional dynamics. Since the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a proliferation of centers, institutes, or programs of Africana and diaspora studies in universities, the emergence of journals, book series, and the availability of research funds, as well as an upsurge of academic and non-academic conferences. Also, public venues for diaspora discourses and artifacts have grown from museums to the media. Such is the explosion of the literature and sites of African diaspora representation that it has become virtually impossible for any one individual to keep up. However, there are glaring inequalities among countries in the production of diaspora knowledges, which has produced contested epistemic hierarchies and hegemonies.

In the course of my trips to different parts of the world, the challenges of clarifying the terms of discourse and analysis became quite evident. I became acutely conscious of the need to clarify the key concepts we use in the field of African diaspora studies, which structure our methodological and theoretical frameworks. Conceptual clarification often

entails specifying our intellectual and ideological interests, disciplinary and interdisciplinary influences, and problematizing our analytical metaphors and interpretive analogies. In this context, I became more aware of prevailing hegemonies in African diaspora studies: the where, when, what, why, and who is privileged in the field.

During my travels in Europe and Asia some of my interlocutors questioned, both overtly and implicitly, the domination of the Afro-Atlantic model and the U.S. African Americanization of Afro-Europe and Afro-Asia. Clearly, the Atlantic model dominates in African diaspora studies. It is not so much that this model focuses on movements from western Africa to the Americas through the forced migrations of the Atlantic slave trade; it is the assumption that this is emblematic of all African diaspora formations. It seeks to universalize the historical modalities and experiences of Afro-American diasporas, to globalize analytical preoccupations with the construction of 'black' identities. The hegemony or universalizing ambitions of the Atlantic model are partly based on the sheer size of the Afro-Atlantic diasporas in the Americas, which currently number more than 170 million people (about 110 million in South America, 44 million in North American and 23 million in the Caribbean).

Within the Americas, African American experiences and perspectives enjoy primacy thanks to the cultural and economic hegemonies of the United States. This has become a heated issue at international diaspora conferences. In some of my encounters, I had to fend off suspicions that I had come to propagate American conceptions of African diasporas in their societies. Clearly, we need to confront the asymmetries in knowledge production about African diasporas in different world regions, and desist from imposing models derived out of specific Atlantic or African American experiences; we have much more to gain from truly comparative perspectives and historiographies. Thus I have become more convinced than ever that we need to de-Atlanticize and de-Americanize the histories of African diasporas. For the field to grow it is critical that the Afro-Atlantic and U.S. African American models of African diaspora studies be provincialized rather than universalized as is the tendency among many of us in the U.S. and Anglophone academies for whom the world beyond can only be simulated copies of our own and for those elsewhere anxious to signal their cosmopolitan familiarity with the intellectual products of the world's largest academic system by producing mimic histories.

Behind the contested politics of knowledge production in diaspora studies are divergent conceptions of the terms 'diaspora' and 'African' embodied in the term 'African diaspora.' How do we define 'diaspora' in terms of process, spatiality and periodization? Diasporas emerge out of processes involving movement, migration from a 'here' to a 'there', from a homeland, real or imagined, to a hostland, loved or hated, but not every movement out of one's community, country, or continent qualifies to be called diasporic, for there are important differences between temporary, circulatory, and permanent migrations. The relationship between dispersal and diasporization is quite complicated for dispersed people can 'return' or 'disappear' through assimilation and integration. Thus the development of diaspora consciousness depends on the regimes of inclusion and exclusion in the host society and the emotive pull and geopolitical needs of the homeland. These processes have temporal dimensions and exhibit generational, inter-generational and trans-generational dynamics. In short, diasporas are born, bred, and can die, and even undergo reincarnation or resurrection in future generations.

The temporal and spatial scales of African diaspora formations are the most complex of all diasporas. To begin with, how far do we go back since all modern humans migrated

out of Africa to other continents from about 100,000 years ago? Including the prehistoric migrations would strip the concept of African diaspora of meaning. But confining the history of African diasporas to the last 500 years marked by the Atlantic slave trade as is the tendency in the Atlantic model is too restricting. A happy medium is to focus on the last two millennia, for which there is historical data and encompasses African diaspora formations in the trans-Indian Ocean and trans-Mediterranean worlds of Asia and Europe, respectively, which frees African diasporas from the confines of contemporary global race and gender hierarchies within which Afro-American diasporas were created and all African diasporas are situated and often analyzed.

Despite its ubiquity, the notion of African diaspora is not sufficiently problematized in terms of how 'Africa' and 'Africans' are defined. From the works of V.Y. Mudimbe and others who have examined the idea of Africa (Zezeza 2005b), it is clear that the idea of 'Africa' has an exceedingly complex and contested history. The term has multiple genealogies and meanings. African identities, peoples, and cultures are often mapped, and differentiated, in racial, geographical, historical, or ideological terms. Ironically, all the seven sources of the term 'Africa' originally referred to locations in the northern part of the continent, but now the term has become almost synonymous with sub-Saharan Africa. This is a tribute to the power of Eurocentric racial cartography. 'Africa' is clearly a material and imagined place, the constellation of the places and peoples embedded in its expansive historical geography. It is an invention as much as 'Asia' or 'Europe'—which geographically are of course one continent—or the even more facetious constructs of the 'West' and the 'East'—and all such civilizational spaces; but it has a physical, political, psychic and paradigmatic reality for the peoples who live within or are molded from its cartographic and cultural boundaries, themselves subject to spatial shifts and historical transformations.

Thus, our conception of 'African diasporas' crucially depends on how we define our terms of analysis. In turn, it is clear definitions have historical, national and transnational contexts that frame them. In the Americas the identities of the diasporas of enslavement are often prefixed by 'Afro' or 'African', as in Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Mexicans, African Americans, or African Canadians, while those of the new diasporas tend to name themselves by their national origins as Nigerian Americans, Ghanaian Canadians, etc. In general, the Atlantic model is premised on a racialized construct of 'Africa' as 'sub-Saharan Africa.' Quite predictably, 'black' is the paradigmatic trope in Afro-Atlantic diaspora studies, the pivot around which discourses of 'African' diaspora identities, subjectivities, transnationalisms, engagements, or dialogues are framed and debated. This is quite evident in several recent studies that seek to provide histories of African diasporas beyond the Atlantic world.

The conflation of African diaspora formations with the histories and geographies of Atlantic slavery disregards the histories of other African diasporas in the Americas themselves both during the period of the slave trade and after. To begin with, it fails to problematize the identity of the very Iberians—the Spanish and Portuguese—who began the conquest of the Americas. Among them were peoples of African descent who had been resident in Iberia for centuries. One of my interviewees in Madrid was quite emphatic on the ancient connections between Spain and northern Africa and the long history of the African presence in the country. Recent studies on the migrations of the Moriscos, Ladinos, and even Cape Verdeans to the Americas are pertinent in this regard.

The findings on the free Afro-Iberian migrations to the Americas serve to qualify, but do not of course displace the centrality of forced migrations from western Africa to the Americas. Over the last two decades more African migrants have been arriving, some

even claim have arrived, in the United States than during the Atlantic slave trade. The mobilities, experiences, identities, and dialogues of these diasporas differ and intersect with those of the historic Afro-Atlantic diasporas in complex and contradictory ways. The very existence of intercultural and intertextual diaspora spaces in which they find themselves ensures complex negotiations, representations and performances of racial, national, ethnic and gender identities that are neither already fixed in the diaspora nor imported from Africa. And of course as is clear from my encounters in Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti the identities of the historic Afro-Atlantic diasporas are not frozen; they have continually been reconstructed and reshaped by changing economic, social, cultural, and political contexts, through the dialogic and dialectical interplay of material and discursive processes, the shifting structures of power and the agencies of resistance.

But even for the historic Afro-Atlantic diasporas, some scholars object to the regionalization of the African American model in which the U.S. experience and modes of racialization and identity formation are often generalized to the rest of the Americas even though Afro-Latin America, which is more than twice as large as Afro-North America, has its own quite distinctive histories. Paul Gilroy's influential book, *The Black Atlantic*, which ignores both Africa and Afro-Latin America in the development of Afro-American diaspora consciousness and modernity, exemplifies this unproductive Anglophone analytical conceit. There are of course many U.S. diaspora scholars who have produced excellent comparative studies of Afro-Atlantic diaspora histories and anthropologies in recent years.

This project was informed by the conviction, quite simply, that African diasporas include all those peoples dispersed from the continent in historic and contemporary times, who have constituted themselves or been constituted into diasporas. The key words are 'historic times' and 'constituted' for if we go far enough all humans originated in Africa and if we were to include the prehistoric waves of migration of modern humans that began tens of thousands of years ago from the continent to other continents, the concept of African diasporas would lose any analytical value.

Mapping African Diaspora Histories

Clearly, African diasporas are global and multilayered with diverse histories of dispersal and diasporization within and among regions. By the end of my project, I became quite convinced that one can make broad distinctions between Afro-America, Afro-Europe, and Afro-Asia. My project was conceived to elucidate the histories of African diasporas in the trans-Atlantic, trans-Mediterranean, and trans-Indian Ocean worlds. While the largest, the Afro-American diaspora is historically the most recent. Its development goes back to the sixteenth century, while the histories of African diasporas in Europe and Asia go back many centuries before that. Yet, despite their long histories in Europe and Asia, studies of African diasporas in Europe and Asia are more recent and far less developed than African diaspora studies in the Americas.

There are also significant differences in the current composition of African diasporas in the three regions. The bulk of African diasporas in Europe and Asia are derived from voluntary colonial and postcolonial migrations, while in the Americas the diasporas of enslavement are predominant. The different waves of dispersal and diasporization entail

the existence of overlapping old and new diasporas in many countries. This is more pronounced in western Europe and the United States than in South America and the Caribbean despite the fact that the latter have much larger diaspora populations both absolutely and relatively.

It is worth noting that the largest, richest and most powerful countries in South and North America, Brazil and the United States, respectively, have the largest African diaspora populations in their respective regions and in the world. Similarly, the old colonial superpowers, Britain and France, boast the largest African diasporas in Europe. This underscores the centrality of the African diaspora in the construction of the modern western world and the rise of the dominant powers of Europe and the Americas. As several distinguished African economic historians have argued, Africans made a significant contribution to the industrial revolution of Britain and the rise of the world system dominated by the Atlantic powers.

From some of my conversations with Afro-European scholars recorded in this book, and the numerous studies I have read, it is clear that the historical presence of Africans in Europe goes back millennia. One can distinguish several periods from the classical age to medieval times, the long epoch of the European slave trade (16th–19th centuries), followed by the colonial period (mid-19th to mid-20th centuries), and the era since decolonization (from mid-20th century). Needless to say, there have been variations in the periodization, size, and formation of African diasporas in different parts of Europe.

The first major zone of African settlement was in the southern flanks of the Mediterranean from ancient Rome to Andalusian Spain. The African presence in ancient Rome is now well documented in the works of several classicists, including African and diasporan writers. It is of course well known that northwestern Africans—the so-called Moors—occupied and ruled much of Spain between the early eighth century and the late fifteenth century, but they are rarely discussed in diasporic terms—as an African diaspora. From an African diasporic perspective, during this period Spain constituted an African kingdom in Europe. In the Iberian Peninsula, the trans-Mediterranean and trans-Atlantic dispersals and diasporas met, in so far as some of the earliest Africans to settle in the Americas came from Spain and Portugal. Turkey especially during the Ottoman period was another important destination and transit point for African dispersals and diasporas.

Beyond the Mediterranean littoral in Europe, there are ancient African communities from Russia to Britain. Some argue that the scattered African communities on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus mountains were brought there between the 16th and 19th centuries as slaves for the Turkish and Abkhazian rulers, while others trace their origins many centuries earlier as remnants of an Egyptian army that invaded the region in antiquity. The two explanations may not necessarily be contradictory in so far as there were probably different waves of African dispersals in Russia. The history of Africans in Britain can be traced back two thousand years, but the African presence became more evident following the rise of the Atlantic slave trade. Many of the Africans worked as domestic servants, tradesmen, soldiers, and sailors. A growing stream of Africans coming for education—a tradition that began in the eighteenth century and accelerated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—later joined them.

Many of the descendants of the Africans were assimilated into European society; only those who distinguished themselves such as the descendants of Abraham Hannibal including the famous Russian literary figure Alexander Pushkin are remembered. Others survive in archeological artifacts, artistic representations, linguistic legacies, and more

recently DNA excavations. Unlike Afro-America, then, the vast majority of Europe's African diasporas today are derived from the new diasporas. In the Americas the old diasporas will continue to predominate for the foreseeable future. This is certainly true of Afro-Latin America where postcolonial African migrations pale in comparison to Afro-North America.

It could be argued that the histories of African diasporas in Asia are perhaps the most complicated of all. Since far less is known about African diasporas in Asia than in Europe and the Americas it might be worth elaborating on the subject. There are widespread western assumptions that interactions among the world's various regions and peoples were a product of the European-dominated modern era of the last five centuries. It is also often believed that African extra-continental movements were confined to the Americas symbolized by the slave ship. In reality, Indian Ocean histories show interactions between Africa and Asia long predated the establishment of European global hegemony in the 16th and 17th centuries. Also, African movements involved both free and forced migrations.

Another problem arises out of western racialized constructions of Africa and Africans, Asia and Asians, and Arabia and Arabs. As it was stressed to me when I visited the Gulf, the Arabs range from white-looking Syrians to brown-skinned Yemenis and dark-skinned Sudanese. The epistemological implications of the fixations with 'race' and the colonial constructs of the presumably immutable identities of the peoples of the two continents is now well known thanks to the works of Edward Said and V.Y. Mudimbe and their numerous followers on Orientalism and the invention of Africa, respectively. It is hard, but we must develop the historical imagination to understand that contemporary constructions of racial identities in the Americas or more specifically the U.S. do not have universal applicability or meaning.

Afro-Asian interactions after prehistoric times could be divided into five periods: what I would call ancient interactions between Pharaonic Egypt and western Asia and ancient Ethiopian connections with the Arabian Peninsula both of which involved conquests and counter-conquests; interactions of the classical era under the Greek and Roman empires; interactions under the Islamic era; interactions under the European era from the 15th and 16th centuries; and contemporary interactions since decolonization. This is to underscore a simple point: major global demographic movements and diaspora formations have historically been tied to the establishment and expansion, ruptures, and realignments of empires.

The spatial dimensions of these interactions involved the Mediterranean-Red Sea corridor linking northern African with western Asia, the Red Sea-Indian Ocean corridor linking northeastern Africa with western and southern Asia, and the Indian Ocean corridor linking eastern Africa with Indian Ocean islands and Asia. Today, of course there are the connections facilitated by the ubiquitous modern transport, communication and information technologies and reinforced by Africa's growing economic linkages with Asia. The first corridor raises interesting questions. My main host in Oman insisted that Africa and Arabia are one continent save for the 'crack' of the Red Sea. This echoes Ali Mazrui's suggestive notion of Afrabia, that Africa and Arabia constitute a contiguous, indeed overlapping space.

If we take into account the above spatial and temporal dimensions, the patterns of dispersal were extremely varied and complex. Much of the literature focuses on three patterns of sub-Saharan African migrations over the last 2,000 years to western Asia from Arabia to Iran from the first millennia; to South and East Asia from the second millennia;

and to the Indian Ocean islands from the 15th century. These migrations took place under the last three periods mentioned above (Islamic, European, and postcolonial). The dispersals were characterized by both free movements in which African merchants, proselytizers, entertainers, sailors and soldiers moved and settled in what we call Asia today, as well as unfree movements under the Arab, Ottoman, and European slave trades.

The emerging literature is emphatic on the dual indeed multiple modalities of African mobilities in the Indian Ocean worlds before the 20th century. They stress there was never any huge demand for African labor in densely populated Asia or the barren desert lands of the Gulf. Yet, in many of these texts such obligatory declarations seem to have little bearing on the actual analyses, which seem to revert to narratives of slavery and diaspora identities that are familiar in Afro-Atlantic narratives. This might be a reflection of the pervasive tentacles of the Afro-Atlantic model, the nature of the sources, the sheer difficulties of reconstructing histories of migration between these regions, or the simple fact that free African dispersals to Asia were not always reconstituted into diasporas. Only more research will tell.

Nevertheless, it is clear that African movements to Asia have a much longer history, the patterns of dispersal were more varied, and the processes of diasporization far more complex. It has been argued that diasporic consciousness among the dispersed Africans in Asia was weaker than in the Atlantic world because of their relatively small size, and the slow and long duration of their migrations, which facilitated assimilation into host populations. In other words, their dispersals lacked the temporal and geographic concentration of the Americas. Also, the varieties of names by which Africa and the Africans have been known in Asia undermined the development of collective identities as 'Africans' or 'black.' They were often known by their specific regions of origin in Africa rather than as Africans—Sudan, Habasha, Zandj, Nuba, Baburu, Takruni, Abid, Mawalid, Kaffir, Habshi, Siddi, and so on.

No less important are the complexities of color and race in Asian societies in which there are many Asians who are as dark as many sub-Saharan Africans and as light as many North Africans. Color therefore is not always a reliable indicator of 'Africanness' as 'blackness'. There has also been considerable debate on the role played by the integrative mechanisms and ideologies of Islam in parts of Asia. Claims have been made that even for the enslaved Islam provided better prospects for social assimilation than segregated Christianity in the slave societies of the Americas. Furthermore, there was the apparent absence of systematic violence, legal segregation, racial and ethnic discrimination on the Atlantic pattern, and paucity of leadership to develop and articulate diasporic consciousness and interests.

Asia is of course a huge continent, so it is important to distinguish the various locations of African diasporas on which historical sources exist and a significant body of knowledge is growing. The Indian Ocean islands pose a special definitional problem in so far as they are a part of Africa and their African populations, from a continental perspective, could be considered part of intra-African diasporas. The islands are also home to Asians and Europeans, so that over the last few centuries they have emerged as the quintessential meeting grounds for Africans, Asians and Europeans. In some sense, they bear resemblances with the Caribbean in terms of the dynamics of creolization.

For Asia proper, there are three key zones. First, Africans in the Arabian Peninsula, in which population movements on both sides have gone on for centuries from the various Red Sea Empires including those of Ethiopia to the rise of Islam to the Arab slave trade. The African presence in this region is unmistakable and the African diaspora has had a marked impact on the region's cultures, economies, and politics. Contemporary migrations have been fueled by the astronomical growth of the oil economy. In 2005, Saudi Arabia

reportedly had the second largest African-born population outside Africa in the world after France.

There is also a long history of African settlements in the Persian Gulf regions of Southern Iraq and Iran. The Africans came from multiple geographic and social origins and occupations. In Southern Iraq, for example, the African presence, which goes back to antiquity, became concentrated in Basra from the 7th century when an Ethiopian soldier, Abu Bakra settled in the city. There are several well-known scholars of African descent whose works have survived to this day, such as Abu 'Uthman' Amr Ibn Bahr al-Kinani al-Fuqaimi al-Basri, known to posterity as al-Jahiz (ca. 776–869), author of the book, *The Glory of Blacks Over Whites*, translated in the 1980s. Southern Iraq is best known for the Revolt of the Zanj 868–883 which dealt a severe blow to slavery and contributed to the crisis in the Abbasid caliphate. More recently, it was reported that following President Obama's victory that black Iraqis, of whom they are an estimated 2 million, made Obama a model to follow.

Finally, there is South Asia, principally Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka. My visit to India and readings on the subject confirm that the African presence in the country goes back at least to the 13th century. Africans came as merchants, sailors, soldiers, and slaves. Various called Habshi (for Abyssinia) and Siddi (meanings vary—one says it is derived from Sayyid Arabic for 'master'), they played various important roles in the political, military, and social life of the country's various empires and kingdoms from the Delhi sultanate to Mughal India. As I discussed with various Indian scholars during my visit, the African Indian presence was quite marked in several parts of the country from the north (Alapur and Jaunpur) to the north-east (Bengal) to the south (Deccan) to the west coast (Janjira, Goa, and Calicut) to the north-west (Cambay) to Gujarat) to the interior (Hyderabad). In fact, they became a powerful political force in their own right in the Deccan in the late 15th and early 16th centuries and established several sultanates including Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar. To quote the title of a book by Dr. Chauhan who I met at the New Delhi Museum, Africans in India ranged *From Slavery to Royalty*, and of another book he recommended I buy, there were *African Elites in India* who would have been unimaginable in the Americas until recently. Two of the African kingdoms in India, Janjira established in 1618 by Siddi Ambar Sainak, an emissary of the legendary Habshi military leader Malik Ambar, and Sachin founded by Siddi Mohammad Abdu l-Karim Khan in 1791, survived until the time of India's independence in 1947 when they joined the new state.

The extent to which the various groups of Africans in Asia became constituted into diasporas is extraordinarily complicated. In some cases, they disappeared, that is they were eventually absorbed into the host populations. In others, they have survived to the present as a distinct community as is the case with the Siddis of India. In yet other cases, new African diasporas are emerging from cultural memories rekindled by recent African migrations and the current circuits of global racial geography. The transition from dispersal to diaspora depends, in part, on the regimes of integration, representation, and repression in the host society. In this context, there is a lot of debate on the integrative mechanisms of Islam in western Asia. Some scholars and my interviewees in the Gulf claimed that in the Muslim societies of the region religious precepts facilitated assimilation and prevented the emergence of the racialized voice of "black consciousness" even among enslaved Africans we are familiar with in the Americas.

Historically, African migrations to the Americas are the most recent, but the most massive. The dynamics of racialized slavery and subjugation ensured the differentiation

and formation of relatively strong African diaspora identities. Nevertheless, the patterns of diasporization varied across the Americas because of national and regional diversity in the political economy of race, the demographic and cultural weight of the African presence, and the cultural ecologies of belonging and alterity. Altogether, at least 15.4 million Africans landed in the Americas during the four long, horrific centuries of the Atlantic Slave trade. By the beginning of the 19th century more Africans had come to the Americas than Europeans, which serves to qualify the conceptualization of hemisphere as a European construct, as some kind of Eurogenic creation, and to restore the African and African diasporic contributions to their rightful place. For several centuries, then, the African diaspora constituted the largest population of the Americas and helped lay the economic, cultural, social, and political foundations of the new settler societies.

African diasporas of various sizes were formed across the Americas from Canada to Argentina; few know that Canada and Argentina had slavery too and have long standing black communities notwithstanding their whitening campaigns. African diasporas emerged in North America's southern cone—Mexico and Central America—as they did in South America's southern cone—Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The largest diasporan communities developed in the United States and Brazil, the leading political and economic powers of the two continents, each with its own brand of racial ideology, the racial separatism of the U.S. and the fictitious 'racial democracy' of Brazil, both of which engendered and sustained the exclusions that reproduced the complex and contradictory processes of diasporization.

The African diasporas retained their demographic superiority in many of the Caribbean islands. Africa's heavy demographic and cultural weight was most evident in my visit to Haiti as recorded in this book, and elsewhere in the Caribbean where I have lived, such as Jamaica, or visited, such as the Bahamas and Trinidad. The African presence is palpable elsewhere in the Caribbean where African populations are large but remain relatively marginalized, such as the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In many ways, in its size and status the Afro-Cuban diaspora lies in the middle of this complex panorama of diaspora populations and their impact as evident in my discussions with several prominent Cuban intellectuals. Indeed, the entire Afro-Caribbean diaspora, perched as it is in the Atlantic in the middle of the Middle Passage embodies all the complex connections, crisscrossings, and cultural compositions of the African diasporas of the Americas. Not surprisingly, Caribbean activists and intellectuals played a crucial role in all the transatlantic Pan-African ideologies and movements.

In global terms, then, there are at least three sets of African diasporas: the trans-Indian Ocean diasporas, trans-Mediterranean diasporas, and trans-Atlantic diasporas. Each of these diasporas has its own histories; they share similarities, differences, and parallels that are exceedingly difficult to analyze. Much of our analytical paradigms and preoccupations, at least in the Afro-Atlantic world, tend to be derived, almost exclusively, from the experiences of the trans-Atlantic diasporas. We need to develop better and more comparative understanding of the histories of Afro-Asia, Afro-Europe, and Afro-America. It cannot be overemphasized that there are subregional differences among these broad configurations; the histories of Afro-Latin America and Afro-North America, for example, have not been mere replicas of each other. Such comparative analyses will of course help, almost as a matter of course, de-center the hegemony of the Atlantic model of diaspora studies and some of its unproductive analytical proclivities. This book represents my efforts to expand my understanding of African diaspora histories.

Regimes of Repression, Struggle and Engagement

From my travels and readings, I was struck by several overwhelming realities in the histories and experiences of African diasporas. Historically, African diaspora communities have generally been subjected to ruthless forms of exploitation, oppression, and marginalization, which provoked protracted struggles for liberation, citizenship, and empowerment. This is powerfully evident in the stories from Venezuela, Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba. Haiti gave the Americas its second revolution out of which emerged a beleaguered black republic, while Cuba gave the region its third revolution, in which Afro-Cubans played a major role and were major beneficiaries, although their struggle for equality is far from over. Marginalization has not been confined to the old diasporas as the experiences of Europe's new African diasporas amply demonstrate.

Despite their oppression and exploitation, African diasporas have made enormous contributions to their host societies. Their role in the construction of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean economies was profound. No less remarkable were their cultural influences and legacies. My observations and conversations recorded in this book convinced me that we need to go beyond simplistic notions of cultural survivals and syncretisms. Instead, the brilliance of the African diasporas lay in their remarkable cultural innovativeness, dynamism, and diversity that transformed the cultures of their respective societies. Out of the diverse cultures from their African homelands, and engagements with the cultures of their hostlands, the African diasporas forged new and extraordinarily vibrant expressive cultures that involved mixtures, borrowings, experimentations, inventions, and circulations within the diaspora and between the diaspora and Africa and the world at large.

Another major theme in diaspora studies, then, one which was quite salient during my research trips centers on the transnationalization of diaspora identities, solidarities, mobilities, and expressive cultures facilitated by developments in global transport, communication and information technologies. I refer here primarily to engagements, linkages, connections, or dialogues among the diasporas themselves and between the diasporas and Africa in various realms of social life, thought, and struggle. The diasporas and Africa have served as signifiers for each other susceptible to strategic manipulation and subject to the changing constructions of their respective identities, social positionalities, and political economies. For some diasporas the levels of transnational engagement have been intense and for others weak or even non-existent. Engagements and dialogues are subject of course to the shifting mediations of particular historical moments.

The engagements and dialogues have encompassed movements of people, the trafficking and flows of cultural practices, productive resources, organizations and movements, ideologies and ideas, images and representations including the very signifier of 'Africa'. In general, the new diasporas enjoy stronger linkages with Africa than the older diasporas and among the latter there are differences of magnitude between and among the diasporas in the Americas, Europe, and Asia conditioned by the availability of resources, the connections between their respective countries and Africa, and the flows of new African migrations.

Much of the scholarly attention has gone towards the political engagements as manifested through Pan-Africanism, which influenced territorial nationalisms across Africa and civil rights struggles in the diaspora. In studies of the old diasporas there has been an analytical tendency to privilege the political connections represented by the Pan-Africanist movement,

while studies of the new diasporas concentrate on the economic engagements through flows of remittances, investment, and skills. This is particularly critical among the new diaspora in Europe as we see in this volume.

No less significant have been ideological and discursive engagements, the circulation of ideas and philosophies embodied in artistic, social, cultural and intellectual movements. They include aesthetic styles and ideologies created, circulated, and consumed through art works and inscriptions, literary movements such as negritude, and feminist ideas. These exchanges have been sustained and reproduced by travel, education, and media representations, and shared artistic languages and invocations of cultural memories and imagined common identities. The power of these connections came through in many of my conversations with intellectuals and artists in the various countries I visited.

Transnational connections have been facilitated by demographic flows, the continuous movement of people from Africa to the diaspora and reverse flows from the diaspora back to Africa. In each region examined in this book, there were multiple waves of migrations from Africa that sustained memories of Africa and built successive layers of African diaspora cultures. It is well to remember that even for the Atlantic world the slave trade was not a one-time event, but a continuous process that lasted four centuries from the mid-15th century to the mid-19th century during which new cultural sedimentations were overlaid in continuous cycles of creolization and syncretism.

For the Atlantic world, the resettlement schemes from the diaspora in Sierra Leone and Liberia are well known. But there were many more trans-Atlantic movements long before the migrations of the 20th and 21st centuries. While the vast majority of the enslaved Africans never saw their ancestral continent again, a precious few did. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the quintessential sojourners of the transoceanic voyages were sailors, and to a lesser extent, soldiers, but there were also traders, students and scholars, political leaders and rebels, religious seers and proselytizers, and ordinary men and women seeking personal and collective salvation from the depredations of their times and circumstances. Returnees from the diaspora to the continent stayed permanently or temporarily, and through them contacts and memories between the diasporas and the continent were kept alive, and vibrant cultural exchanges maintained.

Twentieth-century revolutions in transport and telecommunications, combined with the greater freedoms provided by political independence in Africa and the Caribbean and civil rights elsewhere in the diaspora, compressed the spatial and temporal distances and lowered the political and psychological constraints of travel from the diaspora to Africa and vice-versa. Today, even previously isolated African diasporas like the Siddis in India can travel or hope to travel to Africa and an African scholar like me can visit them in India. This project, as noted in the preface was in fact triggered by the visit of a group of Siddis to East Africa sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

The transnational movements between the diaspora and Africa are particularly strong for the new diasporas. Modern technologies offer them unprecedented opportunities to be transnational and transcultural, to be people of multiple worlds and focalities, perpetually translocated, physically and culturally, between several countries or several continents. They are able to retain ties to Africa in ways that were not possible to earlier waves of African diasporas. As was apparent among people I interviewed in the Gulf, many have families scattered in the region, Europe, and North America with whom they communicate constantly. The new information technologies have created digital diasporas that maintain

powerful virtual ties with their families and communities in Africa and elsewhere and help them sustain and reproduce complex transnational identities.

Through these demographic movements and information networks, cultures both in Africa and the diaspora have continuously influenced each other. That is why in my travels I could easily recognize the expressive cultures I encountered in all their splendid diversities. The tempo of cultural exchanges and linkages has of course varied across time and space. This has been a dynamic and dialogic exchange, not simply a derivative one between a primordial, static Africa and a modern, vibrant diaspora. This is to suggest the need for analyses that are historically grounded, that recognize the cultures of both Africa and the diaspora have been subject to change, innovation, borrowing, and reconstruction, that they are all 'hybrid,' and that the cultural encounters between them have been and will continue to be multiple and multidimensional.

This is one reason we need to transcend the question of African cultural retentions and survivals in the diaspora and examine the traffic of cultural practices in both directions and focusing solely on historical patterns and processes of cultural exchange. We need to examine more systematically how the media of contemporary globalization from television and cinema to video and the Internet affect the production and reproduction, circulation and consumption of transnational diaspora cultures. It stands to reason that various elements—the imagined ontologies of Africanness, constructions of racial hierarchies, selective appropriations of African memories and alterity, material imperatives of cultural change, and the diffusionist trails of cultural transfer—have played a role in the development of diaspora cultures as distinctive cultures marked by similarities, differences, parallels, connections and exchanges with the numerous cultures of continental Africa. The construction, communication, circulation and consumption of cultural practices and paradigms between Africa and its diasporas have encompassed religion, education, literature, art, and music, to mention a few. These flows have constituted, I would argue, an essential part of Africa's modernities, globalization, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism.

The importance of religion in the constitution of African diaspora identities and transnational cultural exchanges cannot be overemphasized. As shown in this book, many of my encounters involved conversations about religion. Africans dispersed from the continent brought with them religious beliefs, rituals, and values into their new lands of settlement and resettlement, just as diasporan Africans who subsequently returned or established connections with the continent came with reinvented religious practices or were sometimes proselytizers of the so-called universal religions. Also, religious institutions and fervor continuously mediated relations between Africans within and outside the continent in settings that sometimes had little to do with religion *per se*. Like all markers of identity, the nature and role of religion has ebbed and flowed, changing over time, depending on local and international contexts as well as the shifting configuration of the religious ideas, institutions and interlocutors themselves.

The old diasporas brought with them to the Americas, Asia, and Europe what are referred to as "traditional," or "indigenous" religions that developed into what have come to be called "African derived religions" (ADRs). They also brought the universal religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Further research on the latter religions promises to be a fruitful area in African diaspora studies. The tendency to treat Islam, Christianity and Judaism as non-African is based on essentialist notions of African cultural and religious authenticity or purity that are unsustainable on historical or experiential grounds: for

many African Muslims, Christians, and Jews their identity as Muslims, Christians or Jews and as Africans are indivisible, one does not necessarily invalidate the other.

The ADRs are widely distributed throughout the Americas and have survived, even thrived, and played an important historical role despite a long history of repression, ridicule, vilification and violence against them. The transnational circulation of Afro-American religious ideas and iconographies in the Atlantic world accelerated during the course of the twentieth century thanks to increased migration of people and circulation of religious signs facilitated by modern communication technologies. In the process many of these gradually became decoupled from exclusive territorial ontologies and adopted indigenizing discursive moves intended to stress their Africanness. As I witnessed in Brazil and Cuba, the traffic in religious ideas, institutions, and iconography has been particularly intense and an important aspect of the African diasporic experience, identity, struggle, agency, and linkages with Africa.

The important role of Islam in the diasporan experience and linkages between Africa and the diaspora is becoming clearer with research on the subject. The African conquerors and rulers of the Iberian Peninsula were Muslim and large numbers of the new African diaspora in Europe are Muslims. As I heard in France, Islam helps dissolve racialized disconnections between West Africans and North Africans. In the Gulf countries I visited, Islam powerfully frames the identities of African diasporas, often trumping race as understood in the United States. In contrast, among the Siddi ethnic identity seems to assuage religious differences among Muslims, Christians, and Hindus.

The size of the Muslim population among the old diasporas in the Americas is not always appreciated. Available estimates indicate that 10–15 percent, and some say up to a third, of the enslaved Africans were Muslims. Women comprised 15–20 percent of the enslaved Muslim population. The experience of enslavement seems to have deepened the religious fervor of the Muslims, who went to great lengths to preserve their belief systems, ritual practices, social customs, modes of dress, and literacy. It has been suggested that the influence of the Muslims was probably much greater than their numbers. Thanks to their spiritual, intellectual, and martial fortitude, Islam became a critical resource for cultural and political resistance. Muslims provided crucial leadership to many of the slave revolts in the Americas including the Haitian Revolution and the numerous uprisings in Bahia, such as the Malês Rebellion of 1835.

The pressures for religious conversion or syncretism were high, and many of the descendants of the Muslims, in the United States, for example, lost their faith, although there are tantalizing suggestions that some elements of Islam were incorporated in African American Christianity, and more remarkably, that many of the founders of the Nation of Islam in the twentieth century may have been descendants of Muslims and the new religion tapped into the Islamic heritage of their ancestors. In the course of the century, orthodox Islam re-emerged, rekindled by the arrival of new Muslim communities among who were members of the new African diasporas especially from North, West and East Africa. They established a series of organizations that helped to spread and consolidate the Islamic presence in the country, and found themselves having to negotiate their relations with Muslims among the old African American diaspora, as well as with Muslim immigrants from other parts of the world, and their identity as Muslims with their old and new identities of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and even class and sexuality.

Christianity has been an equally powerful force in African diaspora histories and in relations between Africa and the diaspora. In the early centuries of Christianity, there

were extensive connections between Christians in Egypt and Ethiopia and their counterparts in southern Europe and Palestine. The history of the Ethiopian diaspora has been traced back to centuries-old religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome that produced Ethiopian communities in those cities. Even for the Atlantic world, there is considerable evidence that there were Christians among the enslaved Africans from the Kongo, who had converted during the early period of Kongolese-Portuguese contact.

For the 19th and early 20th centuries much has been written about diasporan missionaries who came to Africa especially from the Americas. They were, simultaneously, among the most committed to diaspora repatriation and African redemption and also among the most ethnocentric in so far as they sometimes harbored negative and contemptuous views of indigenous African peoples and cultures. They defended the humanity of Africans, but derided the historicity of Africa, so that they were often concurrently critics and collaborators of European colonialism, although they faced numerous restrictions imposed by colonial governments. In the course of the 20th century, Christians from Africa increasingly flocked in the opposite direction towards Europe and the Americas.

The reverse flow of Christians among the new diasporas has included missionaries and followers of conventional Christian denominations both Catholic and Protestant. Particularly remarkable has been the Pentecostal upsurge among the new African diasporas. Some belong to the independent African churches that emerged in opposition to European missionary Christianity in colonial and postcolonial Africa. Finally, there are followers of Africa's ancient Christian traditions belonging to the Egyptian Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. We need to know more about the impact of the different forms of Christianity brought by the new African diasporas and their linkages to those developed by the old African diasporas across both the diaspora and Africa.

There are also intriguing suggestions that the enslaved people from western Africa who were taken to the Americas included some Jews. This is not surprising as there were Jewish communities in western Africa. Indeed, Africa has one of the world's oldest Jewish populations. Certainly African Jews have constituted important streams of the new diasporas in some parts of the world. This is not adequately understood because the Jewish diaspora identity, from which the very notion of diaspora is derived, tends to override the African identity. Since the founding of Israel in 1948 and decolonization in the 1950s and early 1960s, hundreds of thousands of North African Jews migrated to Israel, France, the United States, and elsewhere. In the 1980s and 1990s, an estimated 120,000 Ethiopian Jews (also known as Beta Israel) migrated to Israel. There are also several thousand black Jews from the diaspora, especially the United States and Europe, who have resettled in Israel.

Clearly, religion has played a critical role in the histories of African diasporas. Part of my regret for this project is that despite several efforts I was unable to visit Saudi Arabia, home to the largest African diaspora in the region, both old and new. African migrations to Saudi Arabia in historic times go back to pilgrimages to Mecca following the founding of Islam. Over the centuries, some of the pilgrims settled in the kingdom. Also, the country was a major transit point and destination in the slave trade. In recent decades more than 1.5 million African born migrants have been attracted by Saudi Arabia's booming oil-based economy. By the same token, a visit to Israel would have been beneficial to survey the experiences and identities of the different waves of African Jews.

Music has also served as a powerful cultural crucible and signifier of African diaspora identity formation and engagement. Not surprisingly, music features a lot in many of my

encounters in this book. It has been one of the primary media of communication in the Pan-African world through which cultural influences, ideas, images, instruments, institutions and identities have continuously circulated in the process creating new modes of cultural expression both within Africa itself and in the diaspora. This traffic in expressive culture has been multidimensional and dynamic affecting and transforming all it touches. It has been facilitated by persistent demographic flows and ever-changing communication technologies and has involved exchanges—that are simultaneously transcontinental, transnational, and translational—of artistic products, aesthetic codes, and conceptual matrixes. The musical linkages have been governed as much by the impulses of cultural ecology as by the imperatives of political economy and our understanding of them is, in turn, filtered through the paradigmatic lenses of changing scholarly preoccupations and perceptions.

There is now a vast body of literature on the development and global impact of the music produced by various African diaspora communities especially in the Americas, and extensive debate on the African roots of these musics, and growing attention to the musical exchanges between Africa and its diasporas. Studies written from the diasporic perspective tend to oscillate between those that emphasize the rootedness of diasporan musics in African musical traditions and those that see these musics as inventions of the diasporic experience itself with no underlying African dynamic or essence. In reality, in so far as African music is itself complex and always changing and difficult to categorize, attempts to capture some static African essence of diasporan music may be futile. A more comprehensive historical analysis of diaspora cultures and musics shows that, first, African musics have been influenced and are intricately connected to diaspora musics; second, diasporan musics emerged out of exchanges and circulations within the diaspora itself; and third, during the twentieth century the cross fertilization created new African musics, making music on the continent more diasporic and music in the diaspora more African, a fusion that in all its fluidity has produced African-derived musics of extraordinary creative energies and immense global power and popularity.

Transnational exchanges and relations between Africa and its diasporas are also framed by, and help reshape, intra-diasporan relations. Given the varied histories of African global migrations and diaspora formations, it stands to reason that the composition of what has been called 'overlapping diasporas' varies in different regions and counties. For example, Europe's overlapping diasporas differ from those in the United States where the new diasporas and the old diasporas predominate, respectively. Consequently, the patterns of integration and identity formation for the new diasporas differ in the two regions. This is becoming more evident in comparative studies of new African diasporas in the United States and Europe.

As shown in this book, there are at least four groups of diasporas in France, which hosts the largest African diaspora in Europe: long-standing communities of African descent, Antillean blacks, Africans from West and Central Africa, and Africans from North Africa. These communities have complex relations with each other and with the French state and the wider society, in which the schisms and solidarities of race, religion, region of origin, not to mention nationality, class, and gender play significant and shifting roles. Many West Africans, for example may racially identify with the Antilleans, religiously with the North Africans, and subregionally with the Central Africans.

In Britain, the dominant groups are continental Africans and Afro-Caribbeans. There is also a substantial population of 'white Africans' from Britain's former settler colonies

including South Africa and Zimbabwe. Interestingly, British 'blackness' differs from American blackness. Until recently, in Britain the term 'black' referred to both peoples of African and Asian descent, the ex-colonized peoples of color, who were seen as the national other, inauthentic citizens who could never be truly British, an identity equated with whiteness. This multiracial coalition of 'blackness' crumbled in the face of the destablizations of multiculturalism, new waves of migration from Africa and Asia, and the changing constructions, imbrications and politics of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality in postimperial Britain.

In the U.S. there are also different groups that can claim an African diasporic identity including the historic communities of African Americans, themselves formed out of complex internal and external migrations over several hundred years; migrant communities from other diasporic locations, such as the Caribbean that have maintained or invoke, when necessary or convenient, hyphenated national identities; the recent immigrants from the indigenous communities of Africa some of whom share racialized affinity with the two groups; and African migrants who are themselves diasporas from Asia or Europe, such as Ugandan Asians or South African whites. Each of these diasporas has its own connections and commitments to Africa, its own memories and imaginations of Africa, and its own conceptions of the diasporic condition and identity. The third group is sometimes divided by the racialized codifications of whiteness and blackness, sanctified in the colonial cartographies of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and by U. S. immigration law under which North Africans are classified as white.

Given the complexity and diversity of the African diasporas, it stands to reason that intra-diasporan relations are exceedingly difficult to map out. On the whole, these relations are structured by the contexts of engagement—the social arenas in which the different diasporas interact; the constructs of engagement—the dynamics that mediate their interactions; and the character of the engagements—the content and processes of interactions. The contexts in which the various diasporas interact with each other are both private and public and the varied intersections in between. The connections and disconnections among the different diasporas are conditioned by the specific institutional cultures that set the broad parameters of inter-diasporan interactions, ideological proclivities and affiliations, the nature and formation of collective identities, and personal subjectivities. In so far as communities tend to have multiple identities, inter-group relations among the overlapping diasporas are affected by the intersection of the various dynamics.

Relations between the old and new diasporas tend to be characterized by antagonism, ambivalence, acceptance, adaptation, and assimilation, which often denote cumulative phases of acculturation, mediated by the length of stay in the new hostlands, the spatial and social locations of the different diasporas, their respective connections to Africa and the hostlands and the attitudes of the historic diasporas. Antagonism is often engendered by stereotypes and poor communication on both sides. Over time, successive waves of diasporas tend to be integrated into the older diasporas. This has clearly been the case in the United States and is happening in some parts of Europe as common identities develop among subsequent generations of African diasporas from diverse geographical and cultural origins in response to the pressures of racialization and marginalization and the imperatives of struggle for equality and empowerment.

Equally complex, contradictory and always changing are the images Africa and the diaspora have of each other. These images emerge out of both direct and indirect interactions. In so far as direct interactions between Africans on the continent and in the

diaspora are quite limited despite the engagements discussed above, far more important are the images that circulate through the popular and academic media constructed and controlled by powerful non-Africans and capitalist forces and infused by racist ideologies. Ever since the Atlantic slave trade, Africans and their diasporas in the western world have been racialized and pathologized. Over the past half millennium African peoples and phenomena have been persistently disparaged, always compared unfavorably with the rest of the world almost on every measure, measured according to Euroamerican master references — from humanity to history, civilization to culture, ethics to economics, temporalities to technologies, sociality to sexuality — and constantly found lacking, eternally lagging behind Euroamerica.

The globalization of negative images of Africa as the abode of disease, death, destruction, and dysfunction and its peoples as ahistorical, barbarous, and degenerate was generated and facilitated by the globalization and hegemony of western imperialism. Anti-black racism has entailed the racialization of Africa as the black continent, the dark continent without history, a people outside civilized humanity. This is the burden that has faced progressive African intellectuals on the continent and in the diaspora for generations: how to effectively defend and promote the historicity of Africa and the humanity of Africans; how to empower Africans at home and abroad and emancipate their beloved continent and countries of diasporic residence from centuries of Eurocentric denigration.

Not surprisingly, wherever I went I encountered people with deeply conflicted images and feelings about Africa. Their perceptions of their ancestral continent ranged from the negative to the positive, and their emotions swung from the antagonistic to the affirmative. Clearly, some people in the diaspora are ashamed about their African origins because they are fed and frustrated by media images of endless cycles of war, persistent poverty, and endemic corruption. Others are ambivalent as they celebrate the occasional good news out of Africa and condemn the continent's apparent propensity for creating bad news. There are also those who affirm Africa, either out of Afrocentric convictions or Pan-Africanist solidarity. In my travels I met many people who are committed to the global liberation and upliftment of African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora borne out of an understanding that their fates are intertwined. That was immensely gratifying.

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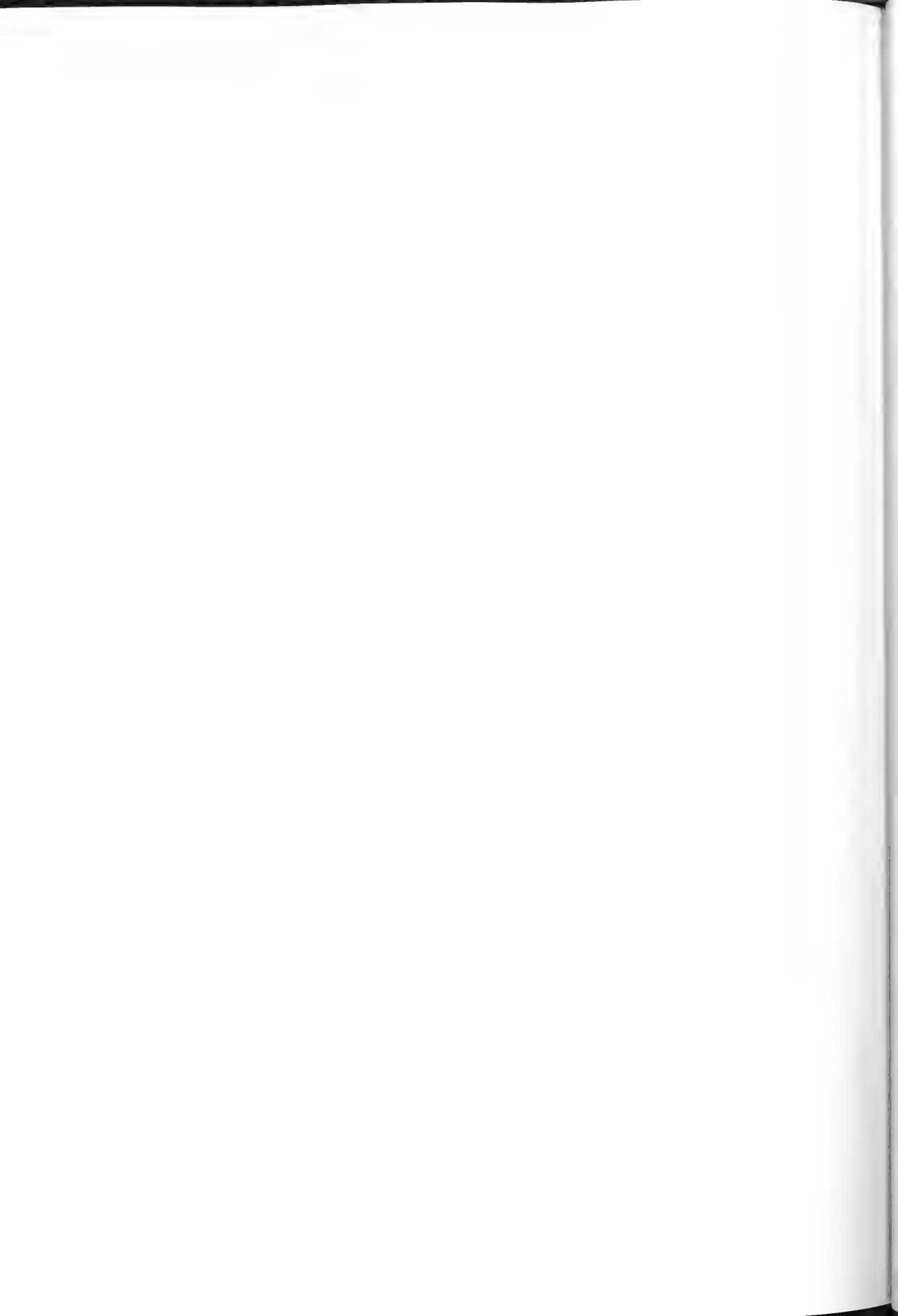
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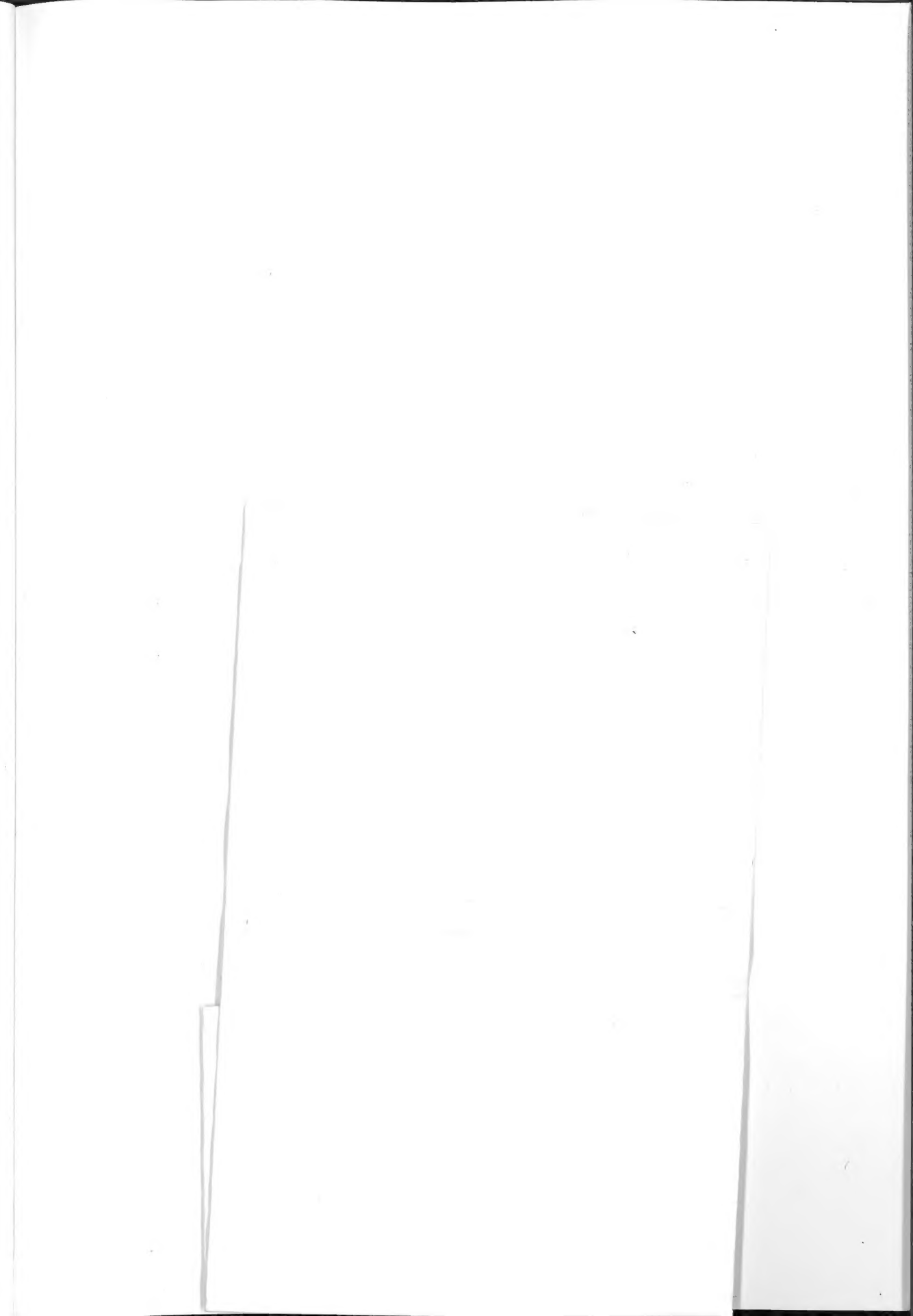
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